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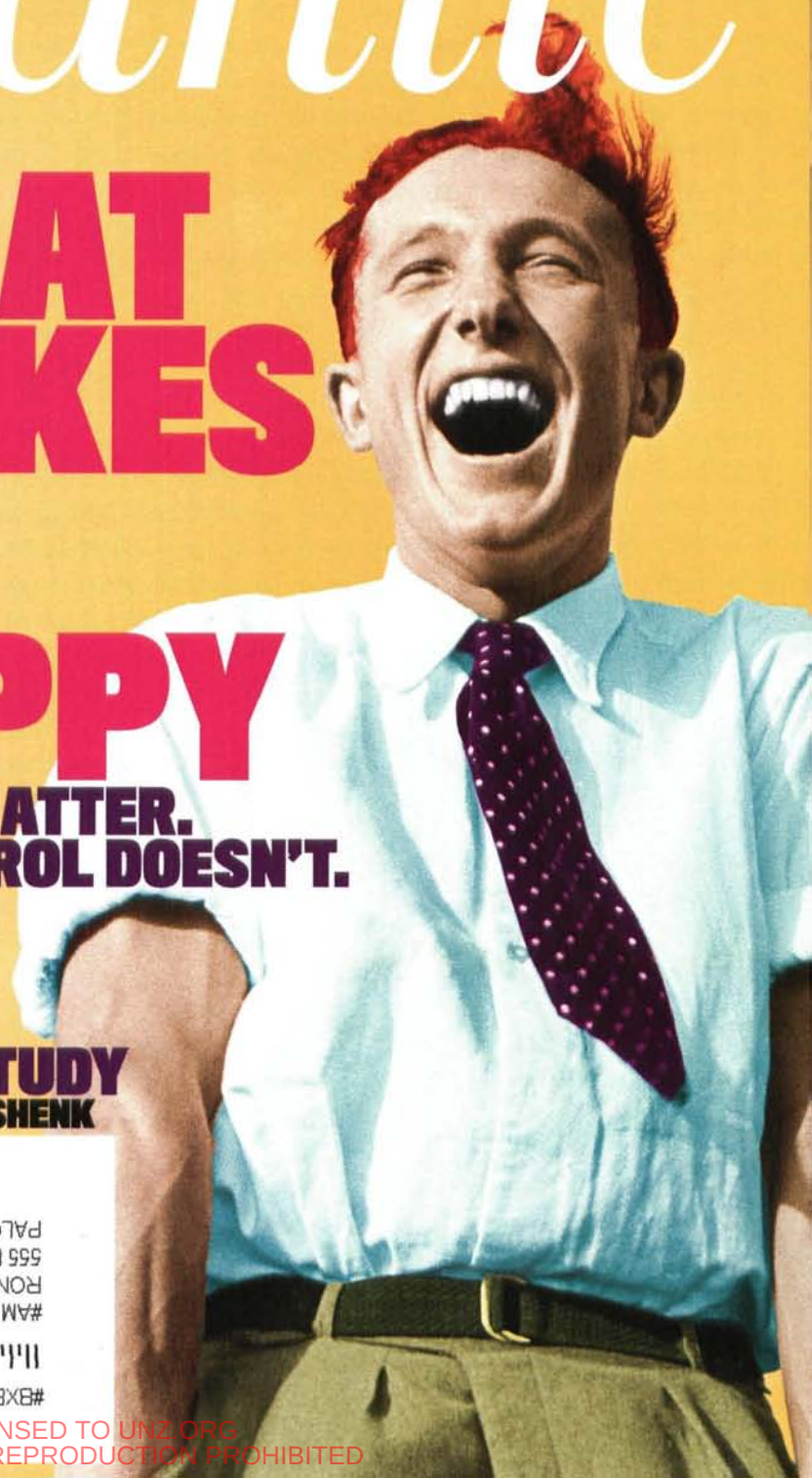
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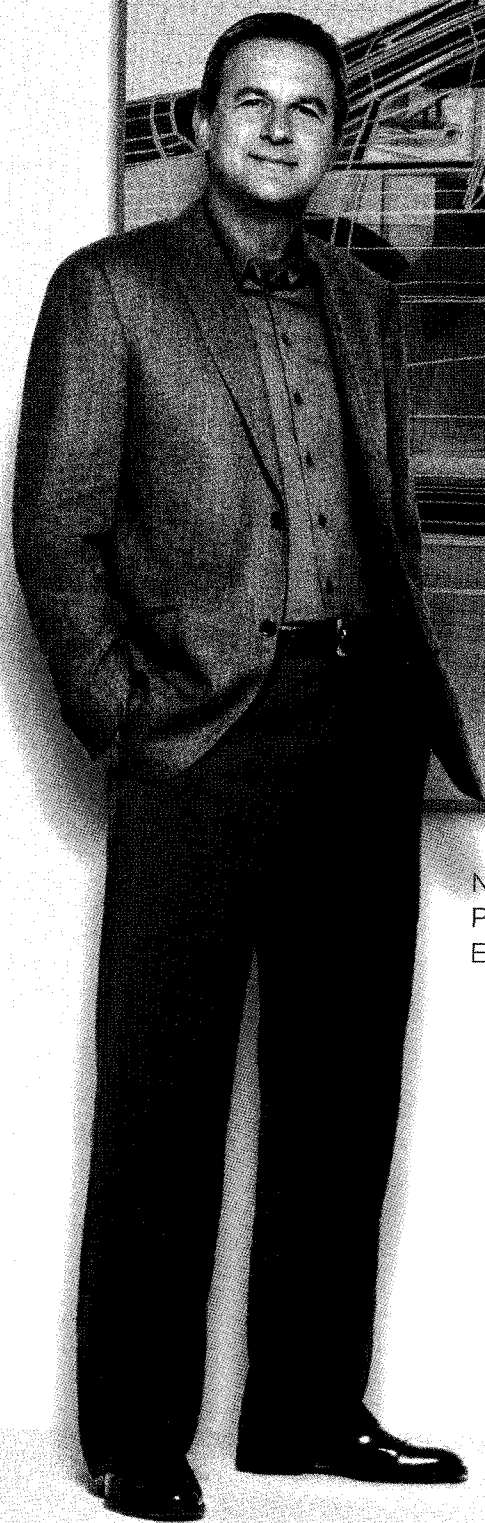
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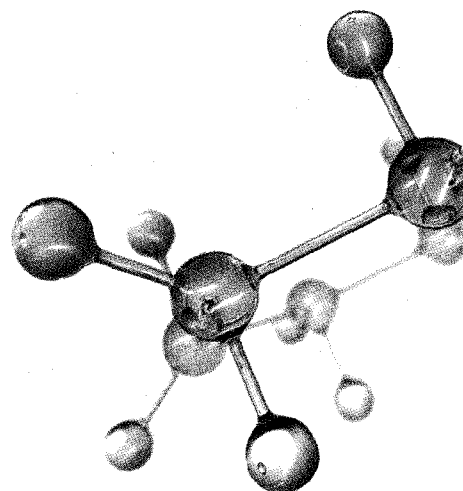
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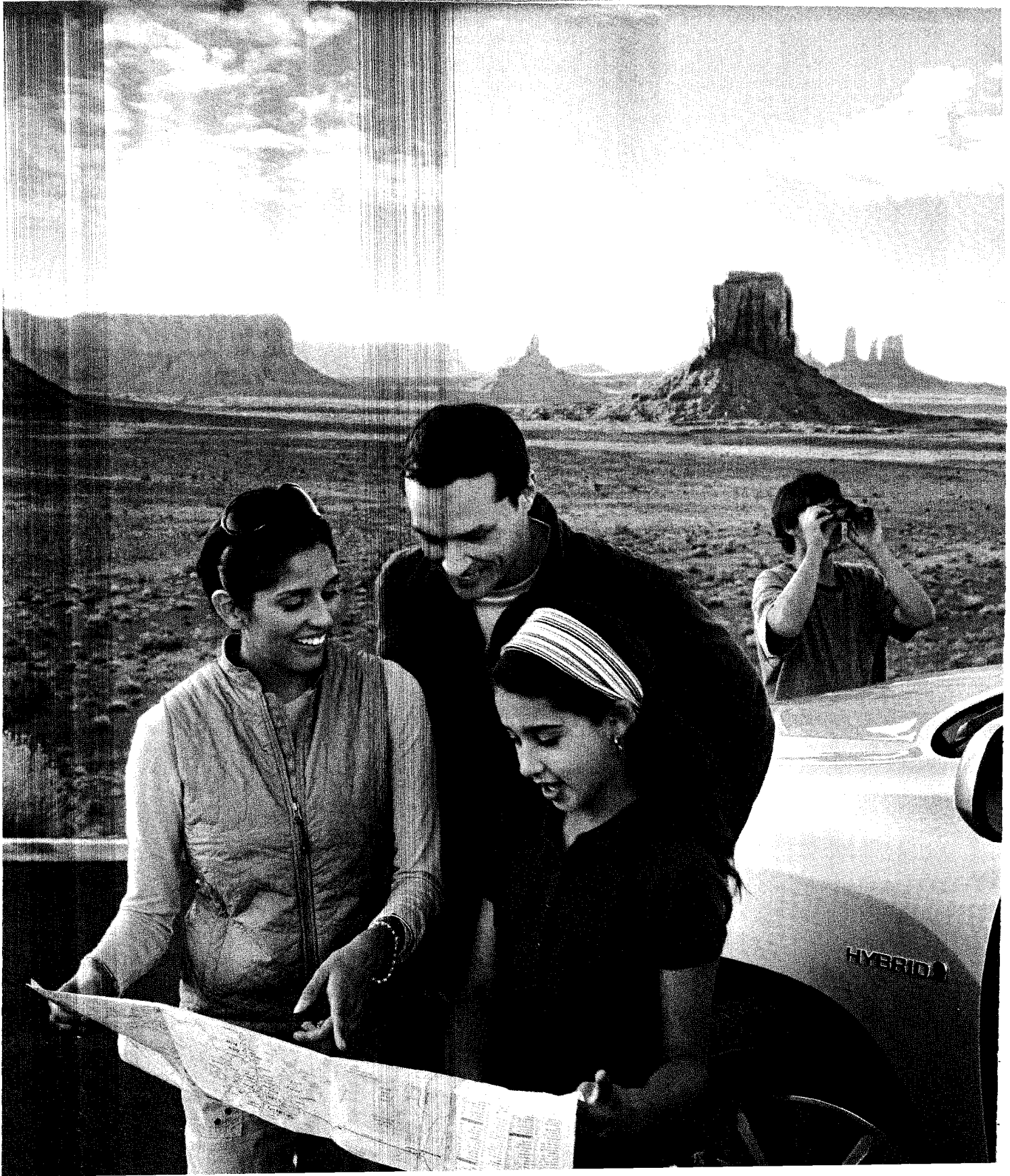
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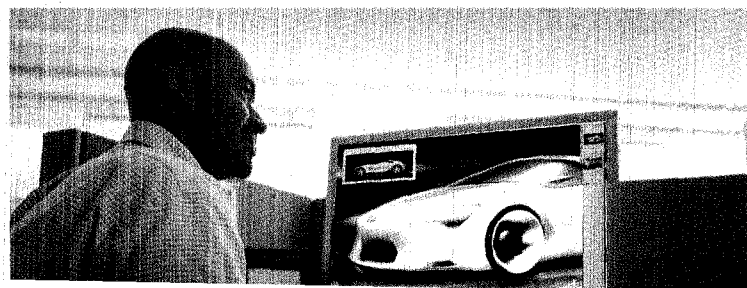
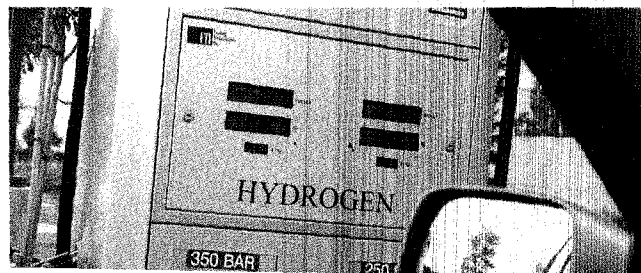
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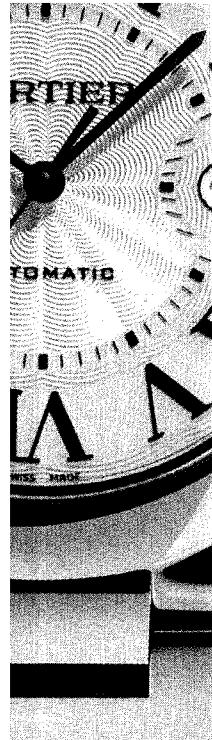
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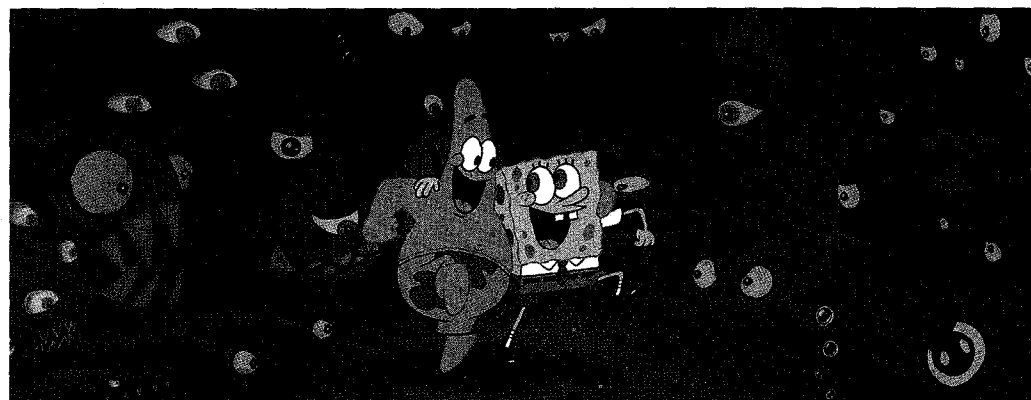
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SLIDESHOW Roll Reversal

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VIDEO Postmodern Bikini Bottom

James Parker deconstructs the tormented irony and contagious optimism of a *SpongeBob* episode.



SLIDESHOW Heart of Darkness

Delphine Schrank narrates a photo collection of the ecological devastation wrought by Congo's civil wars.



VIDEO Pursuit of Happiness

Dr. George Vaillant of Harvard shares insights from 72 years of research on wellness, aging, and the vagaries of human fortune.



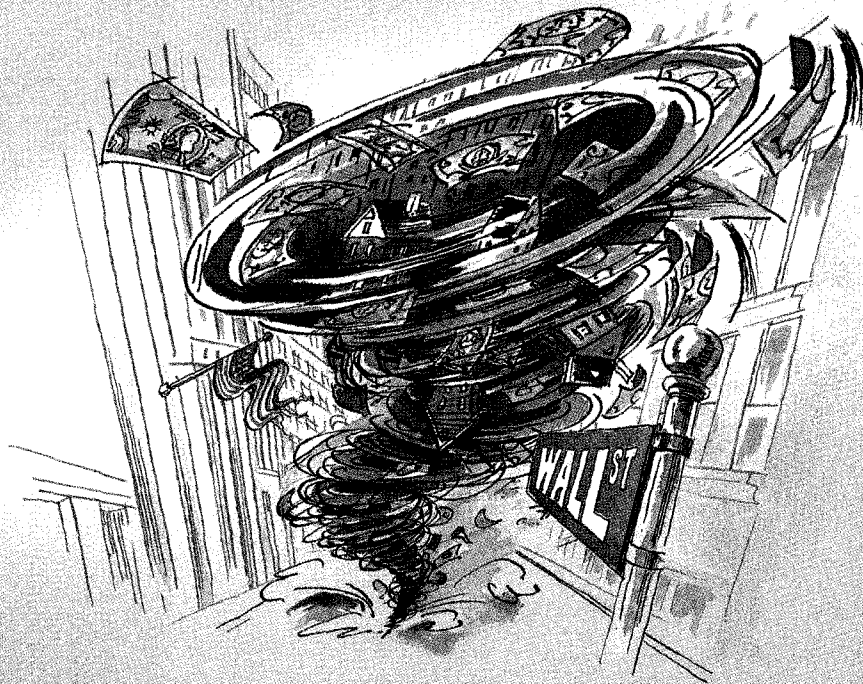
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A man-made disaster just cost America trillions.



HERE'S HOW TO KEEP IT FROM EVER HAPPENING AGAIN.



The worst thing about the current financial crisis is that we did it to ourselves. The forces that led to the disaster were within human control—but so is the solution. **We need to reform federal regulation for the entire financial system. That must include insurance, the one industry truly experienced in dealing with disasters, catastrophes and risk.**

1. COOPERATE

The entire financial system—banks, hedge funds, credit rating agencies, regulators, investment banks, insurance companies and more—is intertwined and interlinked. We must work together to understand the risks and solve the issues. **No one can be left out of the solution, or it won't be a solution.**

2. BE TRANSPARENT

Clarity is key. Only when there is transparency around

valuing the risk in the financial system—including the role of insurance to help mitigate that risk—will we regain confidence in the economy. And only when we streamline and simplify financial information will consumers be able to make truly informed choices.

3. REINVENT

Congress must design federal regulation for the 21st century. It's time to replace the patchwork of regulation coming from countless state and federal agencies with one simple set of rules to oversee all financial businesses—those that pose systemic risk and those that don't.

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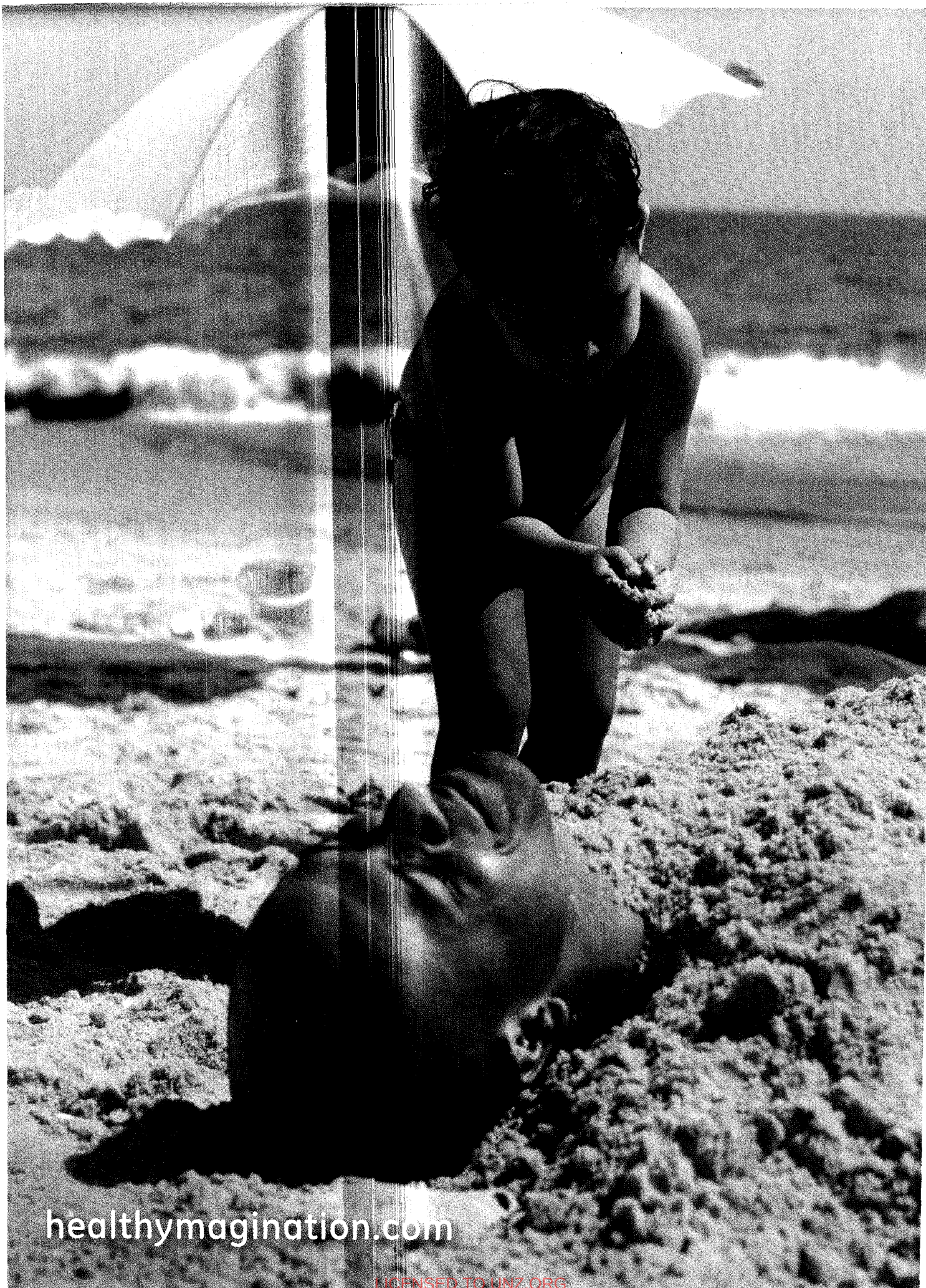
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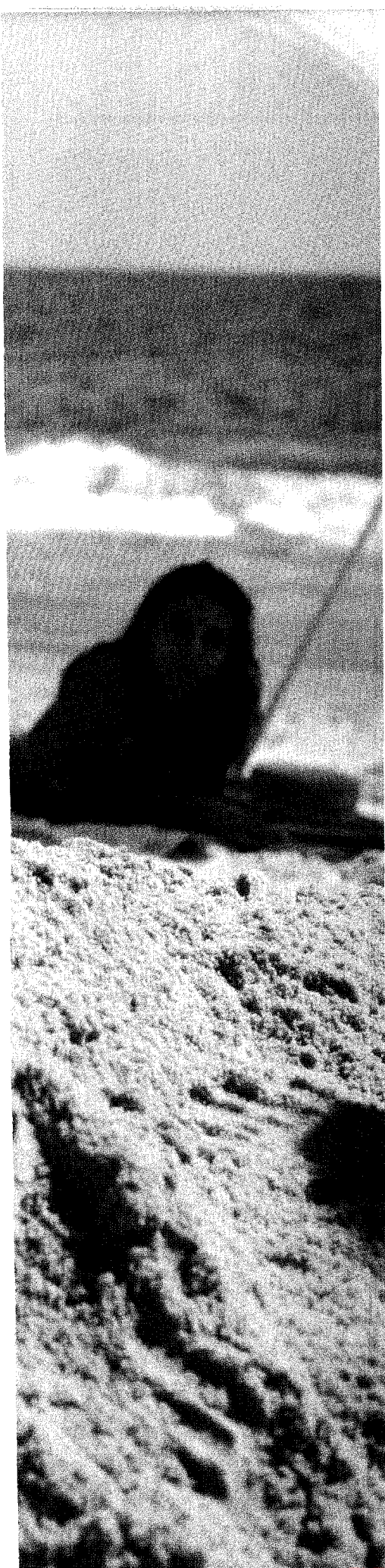


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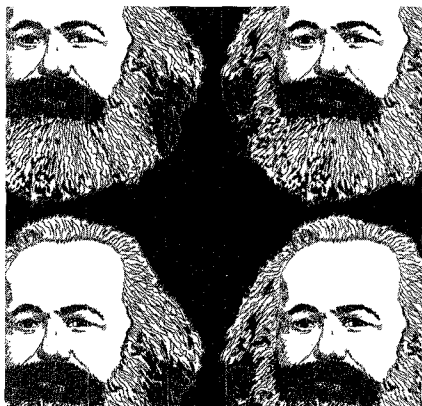
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



LESSONS FROM MARX

I take great solace in Christopher Hitchens's eloquent essay revitalizing the teachings of Karl Marx ("He's Back," April *Atlantic*). Over many years of following the stock market, I have found no more consistent sign that we are at the bottom of a bear market than a renewed interest in the teachings of the author of *Das Kapital*. I have therefore given appropriate directions to my stockbroker.

EDMUND C. TIRYAKIAN
HILLSBOROUGH, N.C.

BREAST IS BEST?

Hanna Rosin's argument that the benefits of breast-feeding are not scientifically validated ("The Case Against Breast-Feeding," April *Atlantic*) misrepresents the medical evidence, detracting from an otherwise valid and important critique of the way American society neglects the needs of women and families.

Unfortunately, the inflammatory nature of Ms. Rosin's article will only perpetuate a fabricated "debate" that's pitting women against one another—the very phenomenon that she condemns. Our lack of societal support for women and families does not cancel out the fact that breast-feeding is a vital factor in the health—emotional

and physical—of mothers and babies. Rather than attempting to make a case "against" breast-feeding that only intensifies the divisions among women, I urge *The Atlantic* to instead make the case for the support that so many American families lack, from birthplace to workplace.

UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING
COMMITTEE FORM LETTER SENT
BY 976 PEOPLE IN 49 STATES

I read "The Case Against Breast-Feeding" online after receiving a seriously agitated e-mail from the United States Breastfeeding Committee. The USBC's e-mail was intended to inflame me into submitting a canned letter condemning

the article and speaking out against it. I am now using the USBC's letter template to thank Ms. Rosin and *The Atlantic* for the piece.

I am a first-time mother with a baby who will soon be 3 months old. Before I had my son, I was working 60-hour weeks as a project manager, a challenging job that I enjoy and am still devoted to. I am married, and my husband also works full time. Like many other women, I received a short maternity leave.

Since my return, I've barely been able to hold my project together, and I feel guilty and deficient every day. It's difficult to complete a

task when you have to breast-feed 12 to 15 times a day, and your partner cannot really help out, because he isn't lactating.

Breast-feeding has been extremely difficult for me. After weeks of pain and repeat visits to my lactation consultant, we were told that my son had some oral-motor-skill deficiencies that were creating the pain and frustration. Now, at the 3-month mark, the pain is more manageable and I'm finally beginning to enjoy this special time with my son.

I suspect that tons of mommies struggle with similar issues but are powering on, trying to do what is best for their children even though all other aspects of their lives are suffering or falling apart. It's rare that I meet anyone, medical professional or otherwise, who doesn't make me feel guilty for considering other options.

LEA REMIGIO
ORLANDO, FLA.

I spent some time on the phone talking with Hanna Rosin in her quest for information for her article, but I apparently did not spend enough time. I was disappointed in her handling of the scientific data on the health effects of human-milk feeding.

Ms. Rosin selectively quoted articles supporting her perspective that there is insufficient evidence for the health benefits of breast-feeding, and ignored the mass of data that provides ample evidence for its benefits. She grudgingly concedes, "The medical literature ... shows that breast-feeding is probably, maybe, a little better" than formula feeding. She should have given

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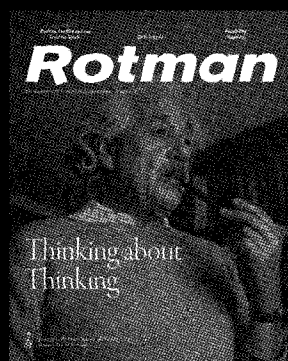
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

more weight to a recent critical review of research in this field, published by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In this nearly 200-page, statistically based, objective analysis of the world's research, the authors demonstrate that the weight of scientific evidence favors breast-feeding. For example, as they show, it is not trivial that breast-feeding reduces the occurrence of ear infections by half; this is, after all, a disease that nearly every child suffers from during the early years of life. Moreover, it has been estimated that a major increase in breast-feeding, especially for a longer duration, would reduce annual health-care costs in the United States by more than \$4 billion.

I am pleased to see that Ms. Rosin is continuing to breast-feed her youngest, even if only for good emotional reasons. He will also reap health benefits, even if his mother does not believe it.

LAWRENCE M. GARTNER, M.D.
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, DEPARTMENTS
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Hanna Rosin replies:

The USBC's letter is the kind of feminist dreaminess I heard from many breast-feeding advocates. "Let's all work to get support for women and families. Let's stop pitting mothers against each other. Let's ease the pressure on harried working mothers." That's great! I'm all for it. But it's not happening anytime soon. So in the short term, the advocates have to recognize that it's not 1971 anymore, and at this point they are contributing to the impossible pressures women today face, not helping alleviate them.

Yes, there is some scientific support for the benefits of breast-feeding. But the question is: How strong is that support, and for what benefits, exactly? And is it so strong that it overrides everything else going on in a woman's life?

Consider the case of Lea Remigio. Somebody should have told her she was a heroine for trying so hard, and encouraged her to explore other options. Nobody should have made her feel guilty. Since

publication of my story, I've heard from hundreds of moms like her—women who couldn't breast-feed for one reason or another and tortured themselves over it. Women who bottle-fed but were ashamed to go to the playground lest anyone find out. Women who kept it up long after they wanted to, pumping in bathroom stalls at work, under their desks, in closets, just out of guilt. Enough already.

I did indeed cite some studies that supported my point, but in general I stuck to a broad overview of the research, and its many deficiencies. I devoted the most space to what's universally considered the best study conducted to date—Michael Kramer's research, which confirmed only minimal benefits of breast-feeding.

Here's what we know for sure so far: breast-feeding seems to provide some small extra protection against infection. This may save your baby from one bout of diarrhea, or maybe from an ear infection. Beyond that, we're not really certain what the benefits are. So every mother should take that information and make her own decision.

PROPHET OF LOVE

Although I appreciate Robert Wright's insight into the way tolerance and love promote globalization ("One World, Under God," April *Atlantic*), I must take issue with his interpretation of the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus may not talk about love much in this Gospel, but he is constantly showing it: healing the afflicted, feeding the hungry, and accepting all sorts of sinners and outcasts in his movement, including people from other religious and ethnic groups.

Calling a woman who is not from Israel a dog, for example, is hardly his "most salient comment on ethnic relations," as Wright claims. When this Syro-Phoenecian woman argues with Jesus, he responds, "You're right!" (as the Contemporary English Version loosely translates) and heals her daughter, apparently redefining his mission as including people of other nationalities. This is something far more radical than tolerance. It is a willingness to learn profound truths from a despised

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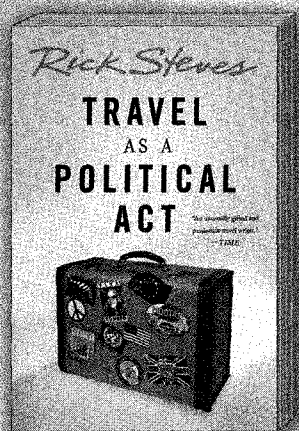


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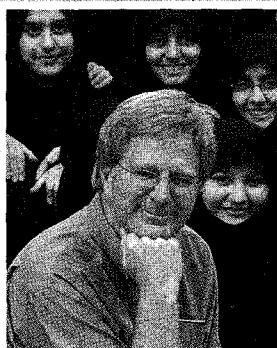
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THE REVEREND THOMAS W. GOODHUE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LONG ISLAND COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
HEMPSTEAD, N.Y.

Robert Wright replies:

*The Reverend Goodhue is right: in this Gospel story, Jesus does finally relent and heal the daughter of the woman whose plea for help he had rebuffed on grounds of her ethnicity. However, as I note in my book *The Evolution of God* (from which the article was adapted), he does so only after she implicitly acknowledges the inferior status of her ethnic group. In rebuffing her, he says, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (New Revised Standard Version translation). The woman—far from arguing that Syro-Phoenicians aren't dogs—answers, "Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then, with her having embraced her end of the master-dog metaphor, Jesus says, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." I wouldn't call this a display of the ethnic egalitarianism we associate with Christian love today.*

BOLIVIA REDUX

Eliza Barclay's portrait of Bolivian President Evo Morales in "The Mugabe of the Andes?" (April *Atlantic*) was grossly biased. It cited only antigovernment sources, offering claims made by Morales's opponents in lieu of facts. For example, the expulsions of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. ambassador were noted with no mention of the cause: their support for radical opposition groups responsible for undermining the government and inciting deadly violence.

President Morales is a uniter, not a divider. His democratic movement

seeks to rectify historic problems of social and cultural exclusion, including the centuries-old oppression of the indigenous majority. Far from advocating the rights of one group over another's, Morales promotes equality among all Bolivians. This is a position that has encountered strong and sometimes violent resistance from the country's entrenched interests.

AMBASSADOR PABLO SOLON
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF BOLIVIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Eliza Barclay replies:

While I appreciate Ambassador Solon's comments, the story does not cite only "antigovernment sources." Miguel Centellas is a social scientist interested in empirical questions. His observation that middle-class support for Evo Morales has declined is not a statement about whether it should have declined. It's based on facts on the ground. The story also cites a supporter of Morales's MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) party, outside of La Paz, whom the party threatened to fine for not joining a march. I did not use her name, because she was afraid of retribution. But she remains a MAS supporter.

It's true that I did not detail the cause for the expulsion of the DEA and the U.S. ambassador, Philip Goldberg, but one week after his expulsion, I attended a press conference in Washington at which he explained that U.S. diplomats regularly meet with groups that oppose the government, in countries around the world, and Bolivia should be no exception. I have not seen evidence that their meeting with opposition groups was directly or indirectly responsible for undermining the government and causing deadly violence.

To submit a letter to the editor, please e-mail us at letters@theatlantic.com. Include your full name, city, and state.

QUICK STUDY

PSYCHOLOGY

Given, to Distraction

Doodling, self-grooming, and fiddling during conversation may indicate good breeding—or at least a good inheritance. When watching taped conversations between two subjects, viewers could accurately gauge each speaker's family income, socioeconomic status, and mother's level of education just from their body language. Subjects from poorer backgrounds were far more engaged—nodding, laughing, and raising their eyebrows—than their less attentive (and more fortunate) peers.

—“*Signs of Socioeconomic Status: A Thin-Slicing Approach*,” Psychological Science

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

War Starts at Home

The physical safety of women in a given country is a better predictor of its peacefulness than wealth, level of Islamic influence, or even strength of democracy. Violence against women (including female infanticide and sex-selective abortion) may account for more deaths than all the wars of the 20th century. This kind of cultural aggression likely sparks increased nationalism and, eventually, warfare.

—“*The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States*,” International Security

ECONOMICS

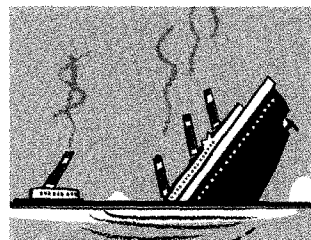
Slave States

Residual psychological effects of the slave trade may be one reason Africa's economies are so dysfunctional. Africans who descend from tribes that were heavily exposed to slavery show



significantly less trust in their local governments, their neighbors, and even their relatives, and they exhibit low confidence in state institutions, the rule of law, and the benefits of civic participation—all attitudes that choke economic growth.

—“*The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa*,” National Bureau of Economic Research



HISTORY

Crash Etiquette

From the confirmed-urban-myths file: as the *Titanic* sank, women and children really were saved first, and first-class passengers were

much more likely to score spots in lifeboats than those in second and third class. A “procreation instinct” may have induced passengers to give way to women of reproductive age and those with children. And upper-class passengers were more likely to survive because they had practice giving orders, access to better information, and the means to bribe crew members.

—“*Surviving the Titanic Disaster: Economic, Natural and Social Determinants*,” CESifo

DEFENSE

Threat on the Steppes

Tajikistan—Afghanistan's northern neighbor—could collapse at any moment. Energy infrastructure is failing, hunger is spreading, and violence and unrest are on the rise. Remittances account for half the country's GDP; as jobs dry up

globally and workers return home, the dictatorial president could face an uprising. This could destabilize Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, threaten U.S. operations in Afghanistan, and trigger a regional disaster.

—“*Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure*,” International Crisis Group

EDUCATION

Inflationary Pressure

When teachers were offered cash rewards for good performance (measured by factors like grades and parental feedback), student scores on national exams significantly declined. Worse: the teachers may have been inflating classroom grades to cash in.

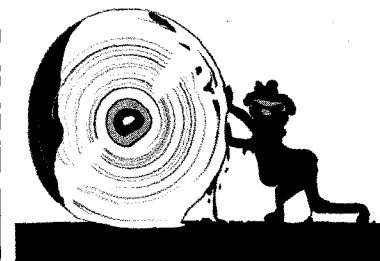
—“*Individual Teacher Incentives, Student Achievement and Grade Inflation*,” Institute for the Study of Labor

CRIME

Hollywood Heist

Mobsters are getting into piracy—of DVDs. And with good reason: a single outfit can control the entire supply chain, typical markups of 1,150 percent offer a much higher profit margin than drug dealing, and an arrest brings only a slap on the wrist. By one estimate, the racket has cost the U.S. 140,000 jobs, nearly \$1 billion in tax revenue, and \$5.5 billion in lost earnings.

—“*Film Piracy, Organized Crime, and Terrorism*,” Rand Corporation





A RELENTLESS LEADER IS THE GREAT

BRENDAN GLEESON
INTO THE STORM
CHURCHILL

HBO FILMS PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH BBC A SCOTT FREE PRODUCTION & A RAINMARK FILMS PRODUCTION
"INTO THE STORM" LEN CARTON WRITTEN BY HOWARD GOODALL EDITED BY JOHN BLOOM ANTONIA VAN DER MEULEN PRODUCTION DESIGNER
DUFFY SCOTT TONY SCOTT DAVID N. THOMPSON DAVID V. ZUCKER PRODUCED BY FRANK OUELLET TRACY SCOTFIELD JULIE TAYLOR

PREMIERES MAY 3

DISPATCHES

- ENVIRONMENT** Delphine Schrank on the unexpected side effects of a pachyderm massacre in Congo
MODERN PLAGUES Pamela Paul joins ruthless canine exterminators on patrol.
CINEMA Peter Savodnik meets the *It Girl* of Russia's angry post-blonde generation.
GLOBALIZATION Trevor Corson explains why some of the best new sushi chefs don't come from Japan.
DRINK Wayne Curtis assesses a new fascination with a colorless, tasteless, and crucial ingredient.
TRAVEL James Fallows visits a Beijing hotel designed free of practical constraint.



ENVIRONMENT

As Go the Hippos ...

UNDER THE WEIGHT OF CONGO'S CIVIL WAR,
AN ECOSYSTEM COLLAPSES.

By Delphine Schrank

ON THE BLUE-GRAY waters of Lake Edward, where the eastern fringe of Congo blends into Uganda, Byanmango Matabishi, a fisherman from the Congolese village of Vitshumbi, stands on a pirogue and shakes his head.

"Nothing," he says, glancing into the empty nets in the hull. "Nothing."

Three days on the lake, and he has no fish to show for it.

By now, the internecine wars of eastern Congo have acquired a haunting familiarity: rebels plunder the country's natural riches, and the looting feeds a cycle of impoverishment, corruption, and violence. But in Vitshumbi, more-elemental changes have been complicating the pattern. The hippopotamuses started falling first. Then the elephants. And now the

fish are disappearing, too. An ecosystem seems to be unraveling.

I traveled to Vitshumbi by SUV last fall, with three park rangers and an environmental activist, through Virunga National Park. The park, Africa's most biodiverse, traverses more than 3,000 square miles of fire-haloed volcanoes and jungled hills before fanning into savanna at Lake Edward. We braked for baboons, two elephants, and a herd of antelope. Beyond stretched the Great Rift Valley, home to some of the earliest remains of humans.

As we drove, Congolese soldiers—ostensibly separating a patchwork of rebel and militia camps—limped by in unlaced boots, rifles slapping against



At one of several UN-run camps near Lake Edward, refugees from the fighting sell fish, fried dough, and firewood.

their backs. A trickle of women carried bags of charcoal burned illicitly from Virunga's hardwood trees. Others walked by in a daze, loaded with mattresses, babies, and plastic jugs. They were fleeing the mortar fire that boomed between the hills—an outbreak of war that pitted two rival rebel groups against a coalition of the Congolese army, at least half a dozen local militias, and the Rwandan military.

When we reached Vitshumbi, fishermen idled among boats in the soft mud of the lakeshore. More than a decade ago, European research groups issued environmental reports, calibrating the ratio of fishermen to fish that would be needed to sustain the lake's ecology. A fisherman's license became his badge of honor, suggesting that he was part master, part guardian of the lake. But the report didn't account for the war.

Now, on one side of the lake are fighters from one of the two rebel groups, a band of Hutus from Rwanda. They shoot elephants, hack off the tusks, leave the mutilated carcasses to scavengers, and swap the ivory for munitions. But as the elephants dwindle, the rebels have turned increasingly to tilapia and catfish for their food and income, plundering the lake's rivulets—spawning ground long off-limits to village fishermen.

On the other side, members of a local militia called PARECO are slaughtering

hippos. They sell the teeth as ivory and the flesh as prized bush meat. In the 1970s, some 29,000 hippos lived in the park. By the end of 2006, their numbers had plummeted to only a few hundred—that year, militia fighters massacred thousands. The lake water, as in the biblical plague, washed the shore red.

The killings have had an unanticipated side effect. A hippo's defecation feeds the plankton that feed the larvae that become the fish on which the villagers rely. A single pachyderm's 60 pounds of daily dung delivers a gargantuan bacterial feast; now, even isolated killings of the animals wreak havoc on the fragile geometry of the lake ecosystem.

There is a further complication. Waves of Congolese refugees have been settling nearby since 2005. At night, they pour onto the lake in numbers far greater than the village's official cap of 400 boats, sometimes in stolen pirogues. They use forbidden nets to clear the leftover life from the lake.

And so the villagers have been forced to eat the small, bony fish that they once would have tossed back into the water as trash.

"It's hard, it's true," says Joseph Casseraga, a fisherman who has worked on the lake for more than 20 years. "But there is nothing else to do." Beside a snarl of recently seized illegal nets, four

of his six children doodle in the dust with sticks.

As we leave the village, we see two men weaving through the tall grasses from the direction of the Rwandan Hutu camp. One strains under a large, lumpy sack.

"Thieves!" shouts one of the park rangers in our car. The two men run. Our SUV chases them toward a tarp, where two soldiers man a checkpoint between the rebel camp and the village.

The car doors fling open, and the rangers jump out and lunge at the thieves, while the soldiers leap to their feet. Amid shouts and scuffling, the sack opens, and stolen fish spill all over their wiry bearer. Covered in slime, the pirate fisherman slumps on the ground. A ranger grabs the other man, who stands limp and silent. The environmental activist fires questions at the two, demanding to know why they were fishing without licenses.

"Because," the wiry man says, "we were hungry." ■

Delphine Schrank traveled to Congo as a fellow with the International Reporting Project.

MODERN PLAGUES

Dog Bites Bug

HOW MAN'S BEST FRIEND CAN HELP HIM EVICT HIS NASTIEST BEDMATE

By Pamela Paul

THE APARTMENT, a vast three-bedroom on the Upper West Side, is the kind most New Yorkers would clamor to live in, were it not for its current occupants. Enter Radar the beagle, indifferent to the incongruity between the space and his mission. "Find the B's," instructs his handler, Carl Massicott of Advanced K9 Detectives, a service based in Milburn, Connecticut. The apartment's owner, a father of two who works in finance, anxiously oversees the investigation. If Radar can pinpoint the source of the problem, which has plagued the master bedroom for nine months, targeted applications of pesticide and steam—as opposed to total fumigation—may yet save the day.

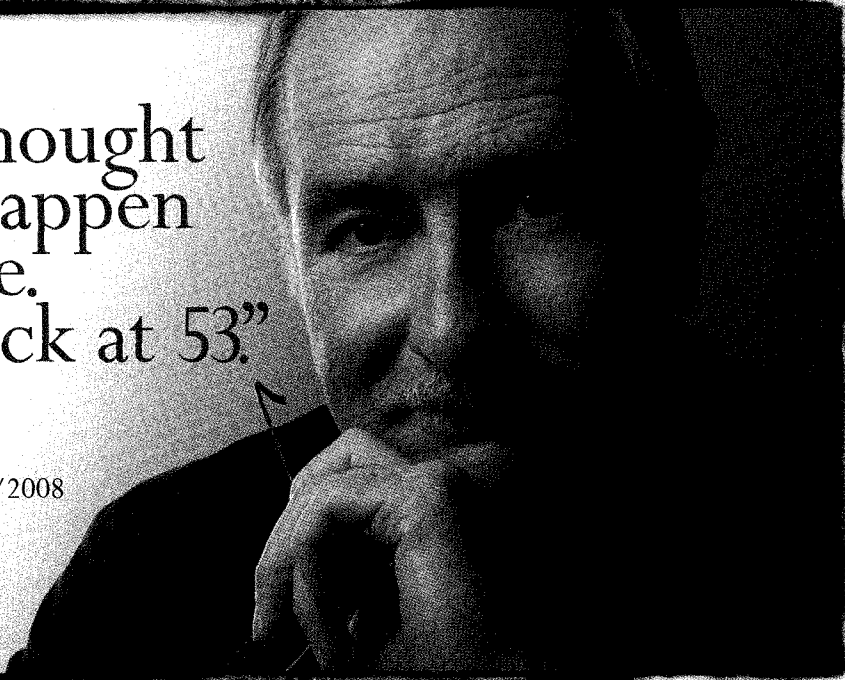
Then, worst fears are realized: Radar halts in front of the 5-year-old's

MORE ONLINE

For a slideshow narrated by the author, visit www.theatlantic.com/congo.
THEATLANTIC.COM

"I never thought
it could happen
to me.
A heart attack at 53."

~Steve A.
New York, NY
Heart attack: 1/9/2008



"I had been feeling fine. But turns out my cholesterol and other risk factors* increased my chance of a heart attack. Now I trust my heart to Lipitor.
Talk to your doctor about your risk and about Lipitor."

- Adding Lipitor may help, when diet and exercise are not enough. Unlike some other cholesterol-lowering medications, Lipitor is FDA-approved to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in patients with several common risk factors, including family history, high blood pressure, low good cholesterol, age and smoking.
- Lipitor has been extensively studied with over 16 years of research. And Lipitor is backed by 400 ongoing or completed clinical studies.

*Patient's risk factors include age, gender, smoking, and high blood pressure.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: LIPITOR is a prescription drug. It is used in patients with multiple risk factors for heart disease such as family history, high blood pressure, age, low HDL ('good' cholesterol) or smoking to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and certain kinds of heart surgeries. When diet and exercise alone are not enough, LIPITOR is used along with a low-fat diet and exercise to lower cholesterol.

LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant. If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all medications you

take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. The most common side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and heartburn. They tend to be mild and often go away.

LIPITOR is one of many cholesterol-lowering treatment options that you and your doctor can consider.

Please see additional important information on next page.



LIPITOR
atorvastatin calcium
tablets



Have a heart to heart with your doctor about your risk. And about Lipitor.

Call 1-888-LIPITOR (1-888-547-4867) or visit www.lipitor.com/steve

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA.

Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

IMPORTANT FACTS



LIPITOR
atorvastatin calcium
tablets

(LIP-ih-tore)

LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

With the help of your doctor and a cholesterol-lowering medicine like LIPITOR, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your cholesterol.

Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:

- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:

- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients who have risk factors for heart disease such as:

- age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-C, heart disease in the family, or
- diabetes with risk factor such as eye problems, kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems.** Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
 - Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
 - Brown or dark-colored urine
 - Feeling more tired than usual
 - Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow
- If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Headache
- Constipation
- Diarrhea, gas
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Rash
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:

- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
- Talk to your pharmacist.
- Go to www.lipitor.com or call 1-888-LIPITOR.



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LPIF Rev 2, Dec 2005

Rx only

bedroom closet. Tupperware boxes containing the trappings of childhood are methodically withdrawn—a bin of Legos here, blocks there. Radar sniffs right by them, then decisively paws a shoebox. Sure enough, a single bedbug, plump with blood, is hunkered down within. “This one’s fed recently,” Massicott confirms, while the apartment owner runs his fingers through his hair, stricken. Radar, wagging his tail, accepts a bit of kibble as a reward.

Radar’s professionalism is a testament to Pepe Peruyero, owner of J & K Canine Academy in High Springs, Florida, who trained the dog for four months, then sold him to Advanced K9 for \$9,500. (“That includes a week of handler training,” Peruyero explains. “It’s a package deal.”) Peruyero boasts that his program trains dogs to distinguish the legitimate threats of live bugs and eggs from the dead bugs, cast skins, hatched eggs, and fecal matter whose detection can prompt unnecessary pest bombing.

Bedbugs, largely eliminated from developed countries after World War II, are back, and harder to kill than ever. The less-than-quarter-inch bugs and their miniscule eggs live in mattresses, books, crevices in the floor. The little suckers (pun, alas, intended) can go more than a year without feeding. And unlike termites, which cluster in the thousands, bedbugs can make trouble in very small numbers; if a single female survives an extermination, she and her hatching eggs will reinfest the space. Pest-control companies consider bedbugs their biggest challenge. After the banning of DDT and other harsh pesticides, exterminators have had to rely on something called Integrated Pest Management, an “environmentally sensitive,” multipronged approach. They can, for example, bake bugs to death by warming a room to 130 degrees using industrial-strength heaters; use mega vacuum cleaners to suck the bugs out; or apply Cryonite, a carbon-dioxide snow that freezes the fluids in the insects’ cells, causing instant death.

Bedbug dogs don’t actually *do* anything to bedbugs. But if the idea is to use less pesticide, dogs may be your best bet. A controlled experiment by entomologists at the University of Florida found that dogs were 98 percent accurate in



Pepe Peruyero teaches Nudie, a Chinese crested terrier mix, to paw where she finds bedbugs.

locating live bedbugs in hotel rooms. In a hotel or apartment building, dogs can determine which rooms require attention, avoiding the telltale stench of mass fumigation and saving thousands of dollars by treating only the affected rooms. (Not that the dogs are cheap: they typically cost about \$325 an hour.) According to recent field research, one trained dog-and-handler team is more effective at detection than trained humans alone, and accomplishes the job in significantly less time.

“You see this?” says John Russell of New Jersey’s Action Termite & Pest Control, pointing into an overstuffed Manhattan closet where one of his dogs, a black Lab named Sara, has indicated a problem. “Clutter! That’s why bedbugs are so hard to find.” The apartment’s tenant, who has lived in his one-bedroom for 34 years, hovers nearby. When Sara noses one of the many jackets within, the tenant grabs it. “I’ll just throw it out,” he says, ushering the garment into the hallway.

Sara isn’t one of Peruyero’s dogs, but a graduate of a competing outfit, the Florida Canine Academy, which claims to have been the first to enter the bedbug business, and also certifies teams to

detect bombs, drugs, money, weapons, termites, and arson. Florida Canine’s trainees, selected for their work ethic, drive, and desire to please, are taught to gesture with their nose, because, “dogs who give the paw,” the owner, Bill Whitstine, says scornfully, “can scratch furniture or end up spreading the bugs around.”

Rival trainers commonly accuse each other of failure to teach dogs to distinguish between live and dead bugs. The National Entomology Scent Detection Canine Association sprang up in 2006, partly in response to “false alerting” problems among bug-sniffing dogs. “We were really concerned that a few dogs improperly trained could tarnish the whole industry,” the president, J. Louis Witherington, told me. Still, disagreement persists about the best way to train and accredit bedbug dogs.

“A lot of programs have been successful training narcotic dogs, bomb dogs, arson dogs,” Peruyero says. “But it’s a totally different world with bedbug dogs. The only thing tougher is training dogs to detect melanoma.” ■

Pamela Paul is the author, most recently, of Parenting, Inc.

CINEMA

From Russia, With Self-Loathing

MEET AGNIYA KUZNETSOVA, THE IT GIRL FOR A POORER, DARKER, ANGRIER RUSSIA.

By Peter Savodnik

Vladimir Putin’s tenure as Russian president was defined, among other things, by the parade of “It Girls” catapulted to local—and in a few cases, like that of Ksenia Sobchak, global—fame under his watch: young women whose unofficial job was to broadcast the exuberance, the strut, the sexual prowess of a reviving superpower. A few of these starlets actually did something (for example, Dasha Zhukova opened an art gallery); almost all were beneficiaries of powerful fathers and/or significant others. Like Paris Hilton, they were famous for being famous.

Now the oil boom is over, and the economic *kreezis* has tossed oligarchs

off *Forbes*'s annual list of billionaires, halted skyscrapers mid-storey, and sparked Communist demonstrations in Vladivostok and Moscow. A new inwardness, a discontent, is seeping across the country.

A leading indicator of this psychic shift is the rise of the Anti-It Girl Agniya Kuznetsova, dubbed "the face of a generation" by the blockbuster movie producer Elena Yatsura and touted by *GQ Russia* as one of a handful of young actors to look out for. "There is no artist who is so young who has succeeded so fabulously in terms of projects and directors," gushed Anton Dolin, a leading Moscow film critic.

Unlike her mostly blond predecessors, almost all of whom come from Moscow or St. Petersburg, Kuznetsova is from the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, three time zones east of the capital, in the very heart of the Russian steppe. More important, perhaps, her success has not been imposed from on high, by some oligarch or government minister. It springs in large part from her role in *Cargo 200*, a film by Alexey Balabanov, one of Russia's most radical directors.

Set in a provincial Russian town in 1984, during the Afghan conflict, *Cargo 200* (released in Russia in 2007 and in the United States earlier this year) depicts the abduction and rape of the young daughter of a local Communist Party chieftain. It is terrifying, grim, and absurd: most of the characters, including the young woman around whom the movie revolves, Angelica (played by Kuznetsova), seem

too tired to grasp what is happening to them. Kuznetsova's girlishness—the 23-year-old actress is five foot two and 101 pounds, and giggles frequently—coupled with an upbeat sound track, featuring the Soviet band Kino, compound this sense of upside-downness.

Ostensibly, *Cargo 200* is a critique of the late-Soviet period. But it also casts light on Russia today—which may explain why Russian authorities tried to keep the film out of theaters. Over a glass of wine at the Ritz-Carlton's 02 Lounge, on Tverskaya Ulitsa, Moscow's main drag, Kuznetsova notes that it is no coincidence that the culprit behind Angelica's kidnapping is the vodka-swilling, deal-making punk Valery (played by Kuznetsova's boyfriend, Leonid Bichevin). Valery looks 17 or 18, meaning he'd be in his early 40s today—about the same age as Roman Abramovich, Mikhail Prokhorov, Mikhail Fridman, and other oligarchs who, for several years, have been running Russia in conjunction with the Kremlin. "That's Balabanov's take," Kuznetsova says. "It is the boyfriend who will eventually be the man of money. He will be the New Russian." *Cargo 200*—the title is Soviet-army code for dead soldiers being shipped home from the front—is meant to be not a period piece but a window onto the origins of the iniquities of the post-Soviet era.

And Kuznetsova, with her dark hair and plaintive eyes and sometimes obnoxious laugh, has become a new emblem—an emblem not of suffering,

but of anger with the place that Russia has become, a parallel world cordoned off from Europe and the United States that lacks drinkable tap water and a genuinely independent judiciary, and is led by a criminal regime driven by the puniest of ambitions: theft. ■

Peter Savodnik is a writer living in New York.

GLOBALIZATION

American Sushi

U.S. CHEFS ARE BRINGING JAPAN'S TRADEMARK CUISINE BACK TO ITS ROOTS.

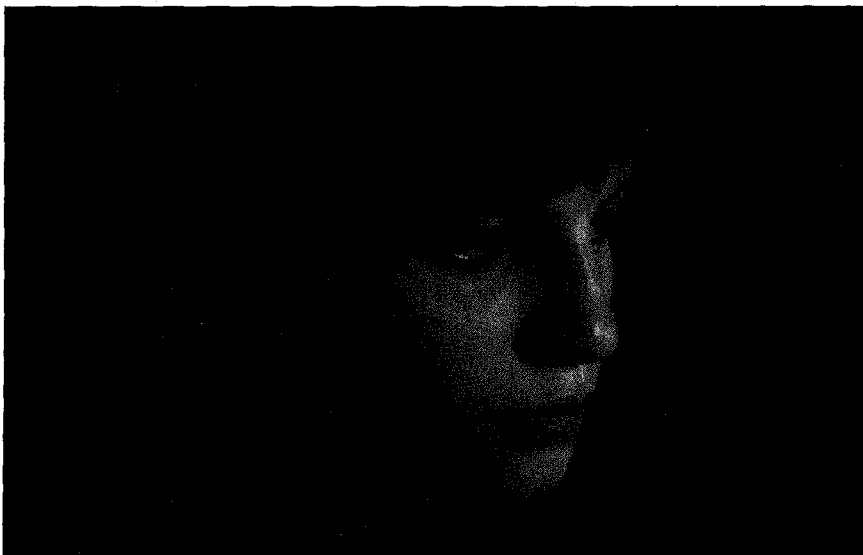
By Trevor Corson

A QUIET REVIVAL of authentic Japanese sushi is under way in the U.S., and it contains the seeds of a revolution that could make eating sushi both more enjoyable and more ecologically sustainable. But this trend is easy to miss, because the new face of sushi isn't always Japanese, or even Asian.

During the pleasant years I spent in Japan, friends would take me to neighborhood sushi joints. Most of the customers would sit around the counter, while the chef, a convivial character who knew many of his patrons, would suggest dishes based on the seasonal and local delicacies he had purchased that morning. After I returned to the U.S., I made a strange discovery: most American sushi diners sat at tables and ordered from menus, through waiters. Confused, I would seek out the sushi bar, but when I sat down, the Japanese chefs were initially standoffish, even dismissive. As soon as I explained—in Japanese—that I'd lived in Japan, they treated me differently.

Jeffrey Nitta helped me understand what I was experiencing. Nitta, a restaurant consultant in Los Angeles, has watched the sushi business since it took root in the U.S. in the 1970s. He and I quickly bonded over our nostalgia for the Japanese way of eating sushi. "The whole industry of sushi worries me," Nitta told me. "There's no more chefs

"I'm a patriot," says Agniya Kuznetsova. "But I don't think it's unpatriotic to criticize your president."



COURTESY CTB FILM COMPANY



getting to know customers.” Nitta’s explanation: “Most Japanese restaurant people think that Americans ultimately cannot appreciate the real deal.”

Instead of teaching us about the full range of sushi fish and shellfish, as well as the varied tastes and textures of the cuisine, most sushi chefs in the U.S. have neglected the Japanese style of eating and force-fed us simplistic menus that feature the least environmentally friendly—and least healthful—items: at the high end, bluefin tuna; at the low end, fatty belly cuts from lesser tuna; along with fatty industrial salmon, and factory-farmed shrimp and eel saturated in sugar. Until the latter half of the 20th century, none of these was considered suitable fare by connoisseurs of traditional sushi; none adheres to the Japanese practice of highlighting local, seasonal ingredients.

So imagine my delight when I walked into a sushi bar one evening and found not only a welcoming neighborhood atmosphere, but a chef who explained that he doesn’t serve bluefin tuna, because he doesn’t want it to go extinct. And imagine my surprise that this restaurant was in western Massachusetts, and that the chef was a rambunctious American whose ancestors had come not from Asia but from Europe.

At Fin Sushi in Lenox, Nick Macioge jokes with his diners and encourages them to get to know each other. Like a sushi bar in Japan, Fin is small and dominated by the counter. It’s not just the atmosphere. Macioge also tries to serve a more authentic meal. Instead of suggesting tuna, for example, he’ll

talk his customers into sampling one of the most traditional sushi fish there is—*saba*, a mackerel that Macioge lightly marinates in salt and vinegar to bring the fish to the peak of flavor.

Macioge admits that it’s hard to persuade Americans to try the more traditional fish and shellfish, even though they’re more flavorful and generally less fatty. (These sea creatures also live lower on the food chain, they’re smaller, and they reproduce more quickly, which means they tend to contain less mercury and the catch is more sustainable.) But his approach has earned the food at Fin Sushi an exceptionally high Zagat rating—27 out of 30.

Macioge is one of a growing number of successful non-Asian sushi chefs. In 2005, *Food & Wine* magazine chose as one of its Best New Chefs a Caucasian sushi chef in Texas named Tyson Cole. A few months later, a San Diego chef named Jerry Warner was picked as California’s Sushi Master. Two years ago, one of the most high-profile Japanese restaurants in America, Morimoto, in New York City—operated by Masaharu Morimoto, an “Iron Chef” of Food Network fame—chose as its head sushi chef a young Caucasian named Robby Cook. And this year, one of the most talked-about sushi bars in San Francisco has been Sebo, run by chefs Daniel Dunham and Michael Black. (Black is half-Japanese and spent the first seven years of his life in Japan.) These chefs offer sushi fish so traditional that most Americans have never heard of them—which is why Dunham and Black chat across the fish case with customers

about what they’re serving, just like the chefs I remember in Japan.

Exactly because these new chefs are rooted in American culture and society, they are well equipped to offer an experience that is, in important ways, authentically Japanese. Consider the case of Marisa Baggett, an African American chef based in Memphis. She told me her goal is to teach Americans in Tennessee and Mississippi to appreciate authentic sushi, but she approaches the task through the local idiom. She educates her customers about traditional sushi etiquette, using clever comparisons to southern manners. And she creates sushi with local ingredients such as smoked duck and pickled okra. This is a fair interpretation of authenticity—in Japanese, the word *sushi* can refer to just about any dish that includes rice seasoned with vinegar, sugar, and salt. Chefs like Baggett put the lie to claims by Japanese sushi-industry lobbyists that eating endangered bluefin tuna is essential to Japanese culture. Indeed, in Portland, Oregon, the head sushi chef at Bamboo Sushi, a Caucasian named Brandon Hill, has just had his menu certified by conservation groups.

Happily for American devotees of authentic sushi, this peculiar new breed of home-grown sushi chefs seems poised to assume the mantle of the cuisine. But I would love to see a new generation of chefs from my home away from home—Japan—try to prove me wrong. ■

Trevor Corson is the author, most recently, of The Story of Sushi.



DRINK

Cold Fusion

ICE—THE MOST NEGLECTED OF COCKTAIL INGREDIENTS—CAN RUIN A DRINK OR MAKE IT COME ALIVE.

By Wayne Curtis

A FRIEND ACCOMPANYING me on a minor debauch one recent evening rang up a new bar to see if it was open. He smiled and passed me the phone. I could hear a cocktail shaker in the background making a crisp *ka-chick-ka-chick* sound.

It was an audibly delicious cocktail, I said.

"Kold-Draft ice, my friend," he said. On the basis of that sound alone, we headed across town.

Ice is certainly the most overlooked ingredient in cocktails. Or at least it was until recently. Ice has typically been an afterthought—invisible, tasteless, essentially free. For decades, bars have used ice machines engineered to shoot out "cubes" like a Gatling gun. But they often produce crumbly, air-filled crescents or hollow tubes that melt almost instantly. The ice in your home freezer is much better than that found at the average bar.

But that's changing. The Violet Hour—a neo-speakeasy with an unmarked, scarcely noticeable door in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood—offers eight kinds of ice, depending on which cocktail you request. A Mai Tai calls for crushed ice, for example,

whereas a Scotch on the rocks demands larger, slower-melting ice. Some might consider an "ice program" an affectation, like a "pillow concierge" at a hotel. I suggested as much to Toby Maloney, a partner in the bar and its head mixologist. He admitted that it sounds like "the most pretentious thing on Earth."

Yet he wouldn't do it any other way: "Ice is as important to a bartender as a stove is to a chef," he explained, in the cadence of an oft-cited mantra. "With a chef, it's a matter of heating things up. With a bartender, it's a matter of cooling things down. You'd never tell a chef he could have only a stove-top burner or a fryer. And I couldn't do without at least three or four different types of ice."

The standard ice used in shakers at the Violet Hour comes from a Kold-Draft machine, which produces one-and-a-quarter-inch cubes. Maloney told me the ice comes out of the machine cold enough to rapidly chill a drink, but not so cold that it shatters when shaken. The bar also employs crushed ice and shard ice, the latter being oblong blocks that fit perfectly into a Collins glass. And Maloney admits to having basic bar ice (which he calls "cheater ice") for cooling bottles. But his bar may be best known for its chunk ice. The night I

visited, a barback deftly chipped away at an angular, Braque-style ice block with a large spoon, taking about 90 seconds to shape something roughly the size of a baseball. After being left to melt slightly, the chunk was rounded and smooth, and it fit into an Old-Fashioned glass as if into a well-used catcher's mitt. Lovely to look at, but does ice really change how a drink tastes?

Sitting at the white marble-top bar, I asked a bartender, Michael Rubel, to make me two Old-Fashioneds, one with cheater ice and the other with chunk ice. He at first refused, displaying the sort of high dudgeon I imagine Picasso would show if asked to complete a paint-by-numbers. But, in the spirit of scientific inquiry, he eventually relented.

The difference was startling. From the first sip, the drink with cheater ice was like a debased "cocktail lite," with thin flavors and watery insipidness. The chunk ice yielded a richer taste, and had a denser, almost velvety texture to it. After five minutes, the cheater cocktail was deadly flat ("quite foul, actually," decreed Rubel after a taste), while the drink with chunk ice seemed to be opening up and blossoming. Only after about 20 minutes had the second drink begun to soften around the edges.

I went into the kitchen with another bartender, Stephen Cole, who hunted up a scale and thermometer. He placed the two kinds of ice into separate cups filled with water. We let them sit for 10 minutes. The cheater-ice water proved to be colder (34 degrees compared with 40 degrees), but the ice had lost a full quarter of its weight, compared with just a 14 percent loss in the chunk ice. A cheater-ice cocktail is thus chillier (numbing the taste buds) and more watery (making it flat).

"Better ice makes better cocktails," Cole said.

Back at the bar, we chatted about "educated" or "seasoned" ice—chunk ice served with straight spirits and typically stout enough to stand up to two or three rounds. Some aficionados claim this improves each drink through a dimly understood process, possibly involving micropores. I am at work on a testing regimen, and I will endeavor to report back. ■

Wayne Curtis is an Atlantic correspondent.

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The six-floor-high atrium of the Opposite House hotel, with its sweeping metal-fabric drapery

TRAVEL

Inexact Opposite

A HOTEL IN BEIJING SHOWS OFF CHINA'S ABILITY TO (ALMOST) GET IT RIGHT.

By James Fallows

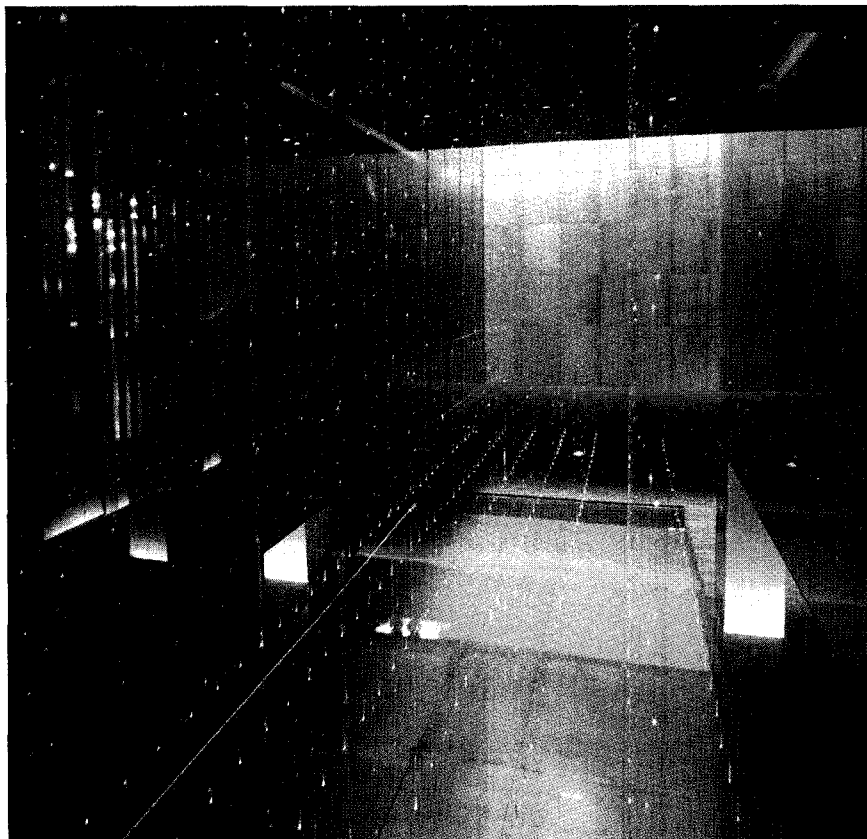
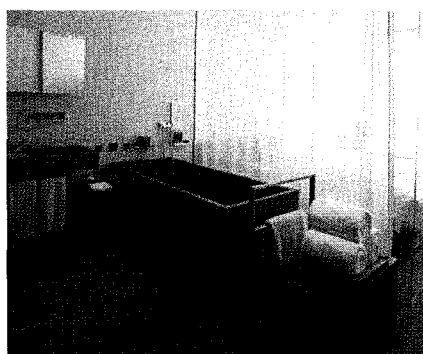
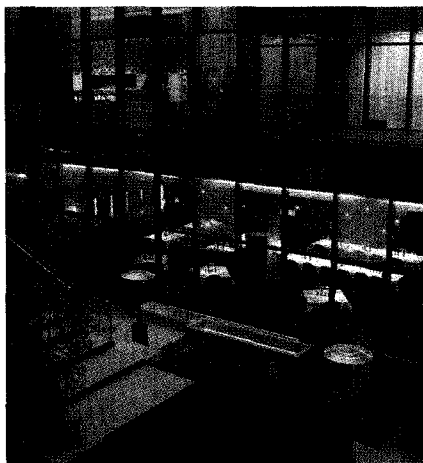
GETTING THINGS DONE fast is easy in China. Getting things done well can be hard. At this stage in China's development, just about everything is poised for rapid, large-scale action. You need a new freeway, seaport, or office complex? Come back in a month and it will be nearly done. The speed with which Chinese factories can switch from one product to another has been crucial to the country's manufacturing rise.

Most of the time, I admire the rough-and-ready Chinese determination to make things happen and worry about the details later on. But admiration requires constant allowances for efforts that are *almost* right. Just in time for the Olympics, Beijing opened a shiny new express rail line out to the shiny new airport. It's a great way to avoid congested freeways—except that the designers didn't bother to include escalators or lifts at the main downtown station for passengers with bags. One evening my wife and I had dinner in a newly opened “international” hotel in Urumqi. Just as a sommelier proudly poured local Xinjiang wine for us to sample, a cleaning attendant started running a mop under the table and mostly over our shoes. No one had gotten around to scheduling the dining and the floor-mopping for separate times.

And thus I am touched and fascinated by the islands of perfectionism in modern China, by efforts to achieve something truly first-rate. I have seen them in factories, in art studios, in university research labs—and most recently in the Sanlitun district of Beijing, from the designers and managers of the new Opposite House hotel.

The hotel's name, based on a Chinese term for the guesthouse in an auspicious spot on the far side of a family courtyard, is the least unusual thing about it. With rooms at list prices of \$700 and up, Opposite House comes in at the very top end of a Beijing hotel market that has been glutted with new

ST. JOHN MOORE



The hotel's exterior barely hints at the sleek design inside—as found at the stainless-steel pool, and in the stylish bathrooms.

capacity just as international business travel has fallen off. I saw no guests in the lobby or public areas during my latest visit on a weekday afternoon. The bar and two restaurants on a lower floor are usually packed, and I'm glad: I find myself pulling for the hotel's survival as a work of creativity and art.

Swire Properties of Hong Kong last year opened yet another of China's big-city luxury retail malls, called the Village at Sanlitun. The original developers planned to include yet another large business hotel in the complex, but when Swire took over, it decided instead to give the Japanese architect Kengo Kuma more or less free rein to conceive a boutique, 99-bed hotel. (Opposite House is the first of a series of planned boutique hotels in Asia for the new Swire Hotels group.) "There are three or four main hotel designers in the world, and you can go into any five-star hotel and say, 'Oh, he did this one, and he did that one,'" Anthony Ross, from Melbourne, the general manager of the Opposite House, told me. "Kengo Kuma had never designed a hotel before. Most of our staff has never worked in

hotels before." Alex Chen, the assistant sales director, who is from Atlanta, said: "There is literally a book on how to design hotels, which we threw away."

One of Kuma's conceits was that the hotel should feel like an "urban forest." On the outside, this means a greenish-glass wall structure that to me has an unpleasant '70s-retro look. But on the inside it means stunning public and private spaces. The public space is a six-floor-high atrium that occupies the center of the building, with a gigantic metal-fabric drapery, which I thought of as a loosely reefed sail. There is no check-in desk, nor any bellmen or other obvious members of staff. "If you come in carrying bags, someone will spot you and come to greet you," Chen said. From there the staff members—young Chinese recruited for affable personalities rather than experience—help guests register using tablet computers. The atrium doubles as a display area for contemporary Chinese art. Two floors down are the gym and a large, stainless-steel swimming pool.

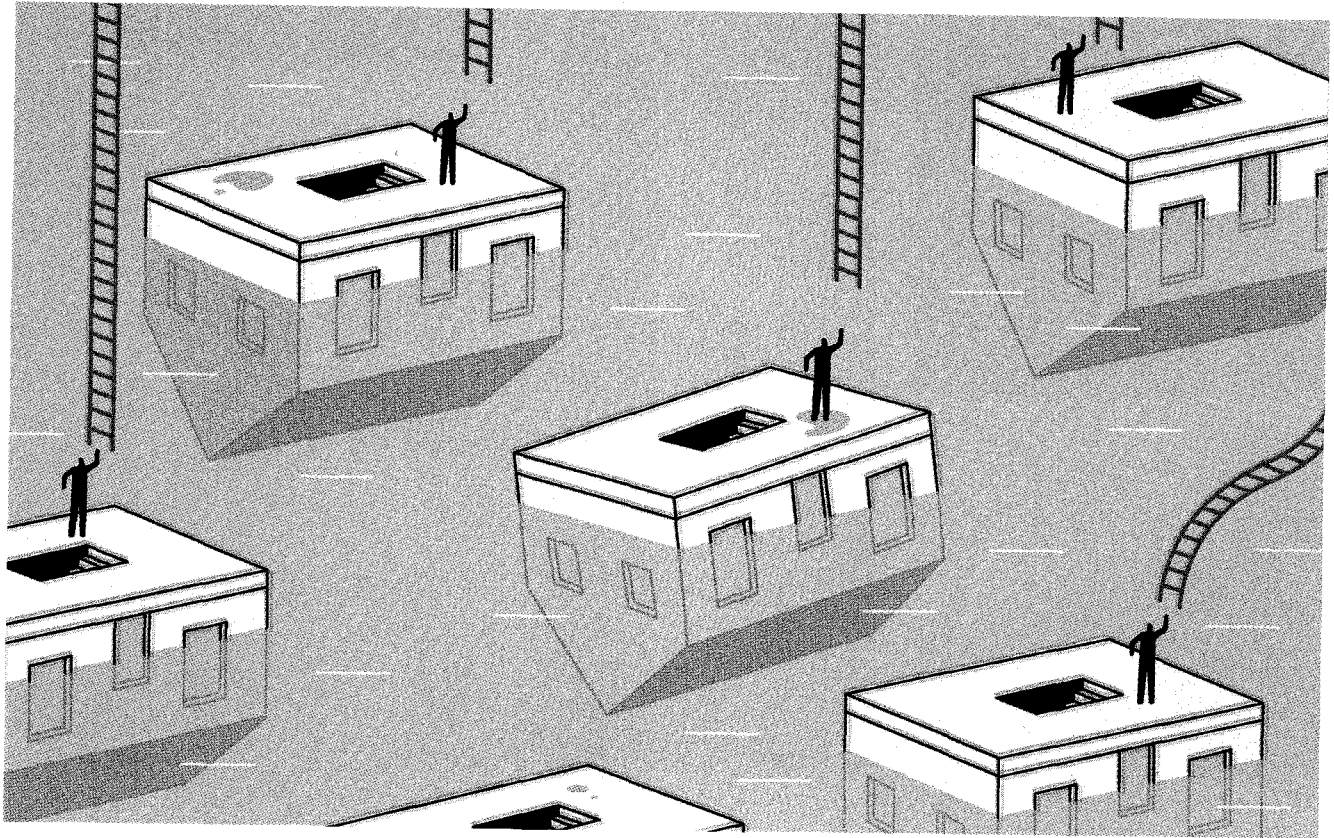
The private spaces, the rooms, look like what an architect would dream of

if freed from practical constraints. They are in two color ranges only: the white/ivory of walls, linens, pillows; and the natural wood hues of the oak floors and the recycled pine (from old structures in southern China) that lines the corridors. In the bathroom, there are square wooden sinks and a huge, deep, rectangular wooden soaking tub. Many of the rooms overlook a rare sylvan area of Beijing, the Sanlitun diplomatic compound, which, with its low-rise buildings and high-rise trees, gives the impression of a mini Central Park. The rooms are called "studios," not rooms, "so guests will feel creative," Ross said. "We want them to feel at home." If only home were this nice.

Niceness is a constant struggle. As we walked through the hotel, I noticed reflecting pools that were being drained to correct leaks and decorations that didn't yet quite fit. These are the challenges of life in China. I admire the attempt to attempt to maintain the first-rate. ■

James Fallows is an Atlantic national correspondent; his site is jamesfallows.theatlantic.com.

TOP LEFT: JILL SHIH; INTERIORS BY WIT ARYASRIWATANA



Sink and Swim

Bankruptcy helps the undeserving—and that's the way it should be.

By Megan McArdle

AMERICA IS THE most bankrupt nation on Earth. Our government is for the nonce relatively solvent, its AAA rating intact. But our citizens declare bankruptcy at a rate that astonishes the rest of the world. In 2007, two years after we tweaked our bankruptcy law to make it tougher on debtors, the number of personal bankruptcies had dropped by more than half, but we were *still* well ahead of Great Britain, our nearest competitor in the Insolvency Olympics: roughly one in 500 Britons declared personal bankruptcy that year, against about one in 300 Americans. Since then, of course, the subprime crisis has increased our lead. We are the Michael Phelps of debt liquidation.

You'd think that title would be one we'd gladly relinquish. But in fact, America leads the developed world in bankruptcies because for more than a century, we've worked hard to build the best—and, not coincidentally, the most generous—bankruptcy code in existence. We didn't do it by design, but in fits and starts; the hodgepodge of innovations that have helped systematically ensure that debtors get a fresh beginning were as much the brainchildren of grasping creditors as of beleaguered debtors. Nonetheless, our system works so well that other nations are trying to move away from their harshly punitive treatment of insolvent debtors, and closer to our free-and-easy, all-is-forgiven model.

Our leniency toward those with unsustainable debts helps not only

profligate debtors, but the rest of us as well. Less onerous bankruptcy procedures boost rates of entrepreneurship: reduce the cost of failure, and people become more willing to take risks. America's business environment is much more dynamic than that of Europe or Japan, for many reasons—and our generosity to capitalism's losers is one of them.

Americans' public attitude toward the bankrupt, however, is not nearly as generous as our law. Every move to make things easier for debtors meets with fierce resistance, not merely from creditors, but from ordinary people who are making payments on time. As this article went to press, the Senate was scrambling to find a compromise on a long-stalled House proposal that would allow bankruptcy judges to

HARRY CAMPBELL

reduce the principal of home loans where the value of the property has fallen below the mortgage's outstanding balance. Known as a "cramdown," the idea was popular with most congressional Democrats, but apparently not with the voting public, which was telling pollsters in ever higher numbers that they thought the whole housing-bailout package was unfair.

And isn't it? Most people didn't take out giant loans with tiny down payments or do repeated cash-out refinancings. Yet the cramdown plan would make the sober, steady majority foot the bill for other people's mistakes. First they would pay as taxpayers by helping to subsidize troubled loans. Then, the next time they needed a mortgage, they'd be charged a higher interest rate to compensate for the risk that they might declare bankruptcy and ask a judge to cram down *their* loan. And maybe they'd have to pay a third time, again as taxpayers, by bailing out banks that got too many of their loans crammed down. Meanwhile, the guy down the street who took out a second mortgage he couldn't afford, to remodel, would be sitting pretty in his \$60,000 kitchen.

It *isn't* fair. But by the time someone is in bankruptcy, the time for fairness is already long past. Bankruptcy is the legal recognition that someone lacks the resources to meet financial obligations. Our system works so well precisely because it mostly sets aside our instinct for just deserts, and instead focuses on minimizing the costs to everyone. It lays out clear and predictable rules for lenders and borrowers, so that they can plan for disaster, and escape as quickly as possible if it arrives. Still, it's plain as day that, in the current crisis, a whole lot of people are getting help they haven't earned. As a result, commentators, academics, and legislators presiding over hearings have diverted much time and energy away from hashing out the ugly details of rescue efforts and toward making the one point on which we can all agree: these relief measures don't seem fair.

But imagine a system that would be "fair" in the eyes of Rick Santelli, the CNBC reporter ranting about "losers" with underwater mortgages, or of Senator Charles Grassley, who suggested that AIG executives should

consider seppuku. Under such a system, a bankrupt company wouldn't get to keep its management; it would be turned over to a receiver, so feckless executives wouldn't get any further benefit from the company they'd ruined. Ideally, those executives would be personally liable for as much of the company's debt as feasible, and they certainly wouldn't be able to shed that liability with a well-timed personal bankruptcy.

But it's not just executives who would suffer; in a really fair system, ordinary joes who ran merely their households into the ground wouldn't get off easy, either. After all, most people who end up in bankruptcy made some decision that landed them there; a recent study indicates that the main difference between those who declare bankruptcy and others with the same income who do not is simply how much debt they took on. With more "fairness," heavy borrowers couldn't just walk into a court, turn over their spare cash, and walk away free, as those who declare bankruptcy under Chapter 7 do today. (Granted, they take a big hit on their credit report.) Those who are not actually destitute would be put on a very tight budget, and the excess would be turned over to their creditors to repay debts. And if they'd been really irresponsible, borrowing and wasting money they had no hope of repaying, perhaps they wouldn't be allowed to discharge their debts at all. Creditors could seize any little bit of money the debtors ever got their hands on, until the ill-spent borrowings were paid off.

That feels, if not fair, at least fairer—people who have cost other people a lot of money ought to suffer a bit themselves. As it happens, this process describes bankruptcy in much of Europe. And it turns out that it's not so great.

Let's start with the corporate side. Receivership, even as practiced in a relatively forgiving country like Britain, often results in liquidation, not reorganization. Sudden changes of the entire management are hard enough in normal times, but when they take place in bankruptcy, the difficulties are multiplied. Very few people want to go to work for a company that may be terminal, particularly if a tightfisted receiver refuses to pay a premium for their efforts.

Liquidations are very costly. Workers

get fired, of course; suppliers lose business; local governments lose tax revenue. But they're costly even for creditors. Picture what would happen if a receiver shut down GM's assembly lines until they could be sold. The workers would scatter, and with them, painstakingly accumulated human capital. The value of the inventory would plummet. Who wants to buy a car with no warranty and no pipeline for replacement parts? The residual value that GM has built up over decades in marques like Cadillac would vanish. Thus, creditors are often better off accepting partial debt payments from a going concern than selling off the assets piecemeal.

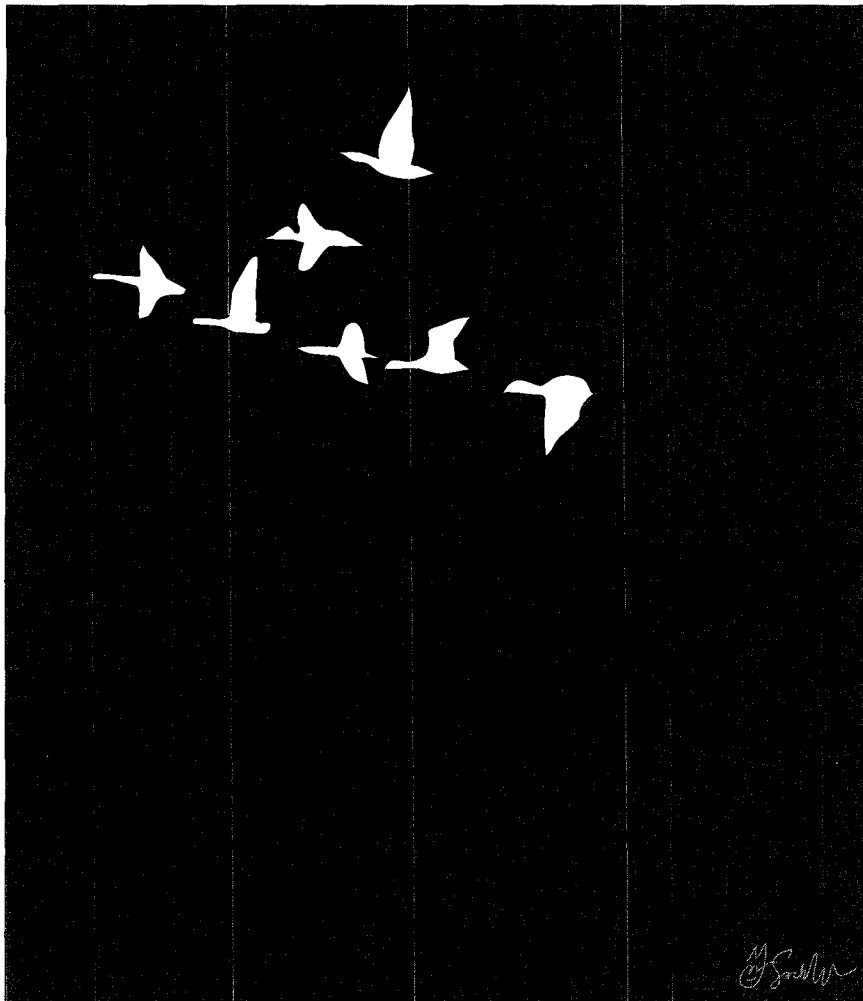
But if corporate liquidation, European-style, is so punitive, why does America encourage *individuals* to liquidate—letting them trade the assets they have on hand for a full discharge—rather than making them work off as much of their debt as possible? In theory, making bankruptcy harder should make us all better off: by discouraging people from taking on too much debt, by paying creditors as much as possible, and by delivering a little just retribution to debtors for their profligacy.

That was the reasoning behind the 2005 bankruptcy reform. Although filings spiked before the law took effect, immediately thereafter they fell off a cliff. In 2006, just 598,000 people filed for bankruptcy, the fewest since Ronald Reagan was president. Filings have increased since but are still well below the rates that prevailed in the relatively sunny economic climate of 2004.

Harsher bankruptcy rules are seemingly doing what we wanted them to do: discouraging excessive risk taking. The question, though, is *Which risks?*

Look at entrepreneurs. All of the business literature indicates that starting a business is a phenomenally stupid thing to do. Most new businesses fail, and not simply because most would-be entrepreneurs are actually no-hopers. Even people who have founded successful companies in the past still have a 70 percent chance of failing. All those business failures are costly—but the successes are the difference between us and Tanzania. We want people to take these kinds of risks, even if that means we write off a lot of bad debt.

Tougher bankruptcy laws don't



necessarily curb the kind of behavior we want to discourage: borrowing money you have no way to repay, in order to buy unnecessary consumer goods. The amount that households put on their credit cards didn't fall after the 2005 reform; over the next two years, it rose 12 percent. According to Michelle J. White, an economist at the University of California at San Diego, many bankrupts are what economists call hyperbolic discounters—people who pay a lot of attention to current pleasures, and very little to future costs. That's why a person's debt, not unemployment or divorce, may be the best predictor of bankruptcy.

If you're the kind of person who buys now and worries later, the idea that government is making your inevitable bankruptcy filing slightly more annoying won't discourage you. Actually, a higher hurdle to bankruptcy will make

things worse, because banks will offer to lend you more money if getting the debt discharged is harder for you—money that you will happily, and irresponsibly, borrow and spend. The people who are most likely to be deterred from borrowing are the people who are taking the rationally contemplated risk of starting a company or buying their first home.

Of course, we'll at least squeeze a little extra cash out of the real deadbeats. Maybe. Most repayment plans set up under Chapter 13 fail. People who weren't previously good at living on a budget don't magically get better at it with a court order. Moreover, job losses or other unexpected events can derail the highly structured payment plans. And the costs of administering an ongoing plan are much higher than for a simple discharge and write-off.

Meanwhile, those payment plans lash people to their old lives, even

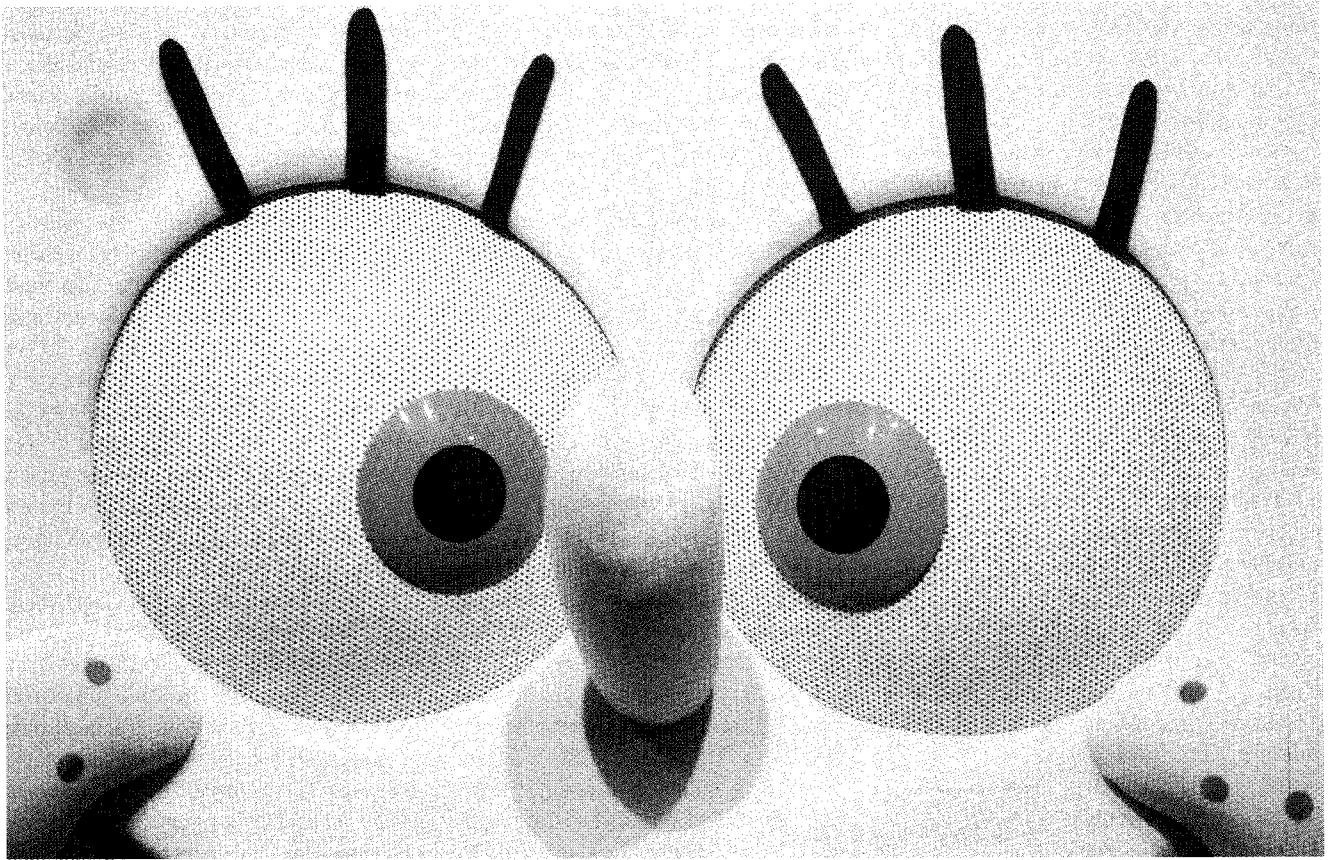
though those lives weren't working all that well; it's hard to move, or get training, for a better job if a court has to approve the expense—and why bother, if a trustee might seize the extra income? In the worst case, the failed Chapter 13 proceeding leaves the most-vulnerable people mired even deeper in debt they can't repay. Such outcomes start to sound less like “fairness” and more like “throwing good money after bad.” Look around. Do the banks seem sounder because we made it harder for people to shed their debts?

These problems are simple compared with the questions raised by the current crisis. Existing bankruptcy law has no easy formula for dealing with a behemoth like Citi, or even GM, that has international subsidiaries, and where any punitive action we take could have massive unintended consequences. But we can look to the bankruptcy law we've evolved for some principles about what works. And what it seems to tell us is that, regarding insolvents, we too often ask the wrong question: *Who should pay?* rather than *Who can?*

Bankruptcy's greatest boon is orderly liquidation of past failures so that banks and borrowers and insolvents can trust in their futures, invest in them. Yet listen to the public commentary on the bailouts, and you'd think that half of America would happily gut the rule of law if doing so would let them punish a single undeserving executive. Is penalizing the traders at AIG really more important than upholding a long-standing liberal democratic tradition?

In ordinary times, we maintain a sort of society-wide doublethink about the problem of insolvency. We all agree that it is a very terrible thing that should be avoided at all costs—but once it has actually happened, we try to forget about the past as quickly as possible, and we focus mostly on providing a predictable and relatively painless way for the insolvents to get back on their feet. That strategy, developed over time through trial and error, has served us well for most of our history. Why is it now a piece of the past that we're only too willing to abandon? ▀

Megan McArdle is The Atlantic's business and economics editor, and the editor of business.theatlantic.com.



A Dreamer of the Golden Dream

The mysterious allure of SpongeBob SquarePants

By James Parker

OF THE COLORS that have colonized the nursery over the past decade or so, blasting their spores across our children's lunch boxes and pajamas—I'm talking about Hulk green, and Elmo red, and Barney purple, and Thomas-the-Tank-Engine blue—none is more stridently offensive to the adult eye than SpongeBob yellow. Poor parent, poor shattered schoolteacher, wherever you look in the general welter of 21st-century-consumer-kid-dom, there it is:

cadmium yellow, Cheerios-box yellow, *yellowcake* yellow, striking its inhuman note of fervency. WAKE UP! GIMME GIMME! NOW!

SpongeBob SquarePants, the cartoon, turned 10 years old this spring. Doesn't that make you feel tired? The little fry cook from Bikini Bottom, down in the benthic zone of the Pacific Ocean, has been with us longer than the iPod. His anniversary, naturally enough, has triggered a fresh avalanche of SpongeBob crapola: for the month of March, Wal-Mart

stores nationwide featured a special freestanding SpongeBob shop called "The Happy Place" (clothes, DVDs, toys, books, etc.), and Hasbro and Mattel between them are rolling out seven new SpongeBob board games. At February's Toy Fair in New York City, Barbie herself consented to be co-branded, appearing with SpongeBob

T-shirt and accessories inside a new "Barbie Loves SpongeBob" window box.

The marketing of products to children is a dirty business, no doubt, but

MORE ONLINE

For James Parker's commentary on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, visit www.theatlantic.com/spongebob.
THEATLANTIC.COM

FREDERICK M. BROWN/GETTY IMAGES

SpongeBob's economic buoyancy has a very pure relation to his character and pursuits. The sponge is a one-man stimulus package, not just commercially but *morally*. If consumer confidence had a face, it would be the gleaming, avid face of SpongeBob SquarePants.

"SpongeBob is one of the greatest believers in the American dream in all of children's entertainment," says Greg Rowland, whose consultancy, Greg Rowland Semiotics, has performed brand analyses for Unilever, KFC, and Coca-Cola. "He's courageous, he's optimistic, he's representing everything that Mickey Mouse should have represented but never did. There's even something Jesus-like about him—a 9-year-old Jesus after 15 packets of Junior Mints."

He made his debut on Nickelodeon on May 1, 1999, in a pilot episode called "Help Wanted." The plot: a young sea sponge applies for a job at a grungy ocean-bottom diner called the Krusty Krab. Oh, how he wants this job—the position of fry cook represents the summit of his ambition. He is shaped, fortuitously, like a kitchen sponge. "I'm rea-dy! I'm rea-dy!" he chirrups, eyes and toecaps shining, while a moron starfish called Patrick cheers him on. The interview doesn't go well: he is sniggered at, talked down to. Guess what, though? When the Krusty Krab is invaded by a mob of violently hungry anchovies, it is SpongeBob who saves the day, volleying Krabby Patties at incredible speed through the kitchen hatch and straight into their astonished pieholes. Hooray! "That was the finest fast-foodsmanship I've ever *seen*, Mr. SquarePants!" beams Mr. Krabs, the owner. "Welcome aboard!"

Contained in this nine-minute skit is the complete DNA of SpongeBob's rise to power. His industrial ardor, his outrageous spatula skills, the terrible, idiotic brightness of his eyes. The atmosphere at the Krusty Krab has the monochrome tint of a Gen X workplace satire, a *Clerks* or an *Office Space*; Mr. Krabs cackles over his money, while

Squidward, the tentacled sourpuss at the register, droops with ennui. But SpongeBob's professional life is rainbow-colored. More than an adventure, it is a romance. "What is taking you so long?!" complains Squidward, head through the hatch, in an episode called "The Original Fry Cook." "I'm *adding the love!*" says SpongeBob happily, squirting a little valentine of ketchup onto his latest Krabby Patty. Take that, Karl Marx!

So passionate an investment in the act of production brings its own risks, of course. In "To Love a Patty," SpongeBob finds himself unable to send an especially attractive patty through the hatch. "Such perfection," he murmurs. "From your little lettuce hair to your rosy ketchup cheeks, right down to your mustard smile." He cannot part with it; he must take the patty home and cherish it, spend time with it, *talk* to it, even unto madness.

As a cartoon, *SpongeBob SquarePants* absorbed the advances made by John Kricfalusi's *The Ren and Stimpy Show*—the mood swings, the fugue-like interludes, the surreal plasticity of the characters—but without the earlier show's edge of psychic antagonism. There are plenty of gnashing monsters at the borders of Bikini Bottom, and deep-sea gulches where the breath of nothingness blows. SpongeBob is dismembered; SpongeBob

explodes; intense emotion flays the sponge-flesh from his sponge-bones. But where *Ren and Stimpy* seemed bent on freaking out the more fragile (or stoned) sectors of its audience, the *SquarePants* writers are interested in stories, even in lessons. Again and again, a kind of innocence triumphs—over fear, over snobbery, and over skepticism.

Squidward, doomed and dichotomous, is the permanent foil. An upper-middlebrow elitist ("You can't fool me!" he sneers in *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*, "I listen to Public Radio!"), a wage slave who goes home and—like Tony Hancock in *The Rebel*—throws on

a beret and expands into the world of Art, he curls his squid lip at the quacking, gleeful sponge. But at the auditions for the Bikini Bottom Men's Chorus, it is Squidward who croaks out a disastrous "Figaro" and SpongeBob, borne aloft by a seraphic formation of jellyfish, whose radiant contralto has the choristers snuffling into their mustaches.

Stephen Hillenburg, the show's creator, taught marine biology for three years before getting a degree in animation, and Bikini Bottom has something of the flavor of a midafternoon classroom reverie. Gauzy flower-like symbols float in the upper depth; ferns nod, bubbles rise; wafts of Hawaiian guitar go by. SpongeBob stares and stares from the window of his pineapple-shaped house, making a tiny glockenspiel noise every time he blinks.

Bikini Bottom is also an effortlessly postmodern place, a baby-blue void in which all manner of cultural bric-a-brac drifts and combines. Neptune might pop by, or the Flying Dutchman, or even David Hasselhoff: the climactic scene in *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* features SpongeBob and Patrick clinging, amid live-action waves, to the *Baywatch* star's hairy legs. It even has its own pair of *Watchmen*-style deconstructed superheroes: Mermaid Man, shuffling in peevish slippers toward senility, and his long-suffering sidekick, Barnacle Boy. In *Atlantis SquarePantis*, SpongeBob and the gang are magically transported to the lost undersea city of Atlantis, whose Lord Royal Highness, red-lipped and stack-heeled like a Blue Meanie, has the same initials as L. Ron Hubbard ("My friends call me LRH!"). Various masterpieces hang in the great Atlantean halls, and Squidward is thrilled to discover that he can enter them bodily; he climbs into Van Gogh's crooked bed, and drapes his proboscis alongside the fondant clocks in Dalí's *Persistence of Memory*. "Ask your Mama or your Dada," he sings, perched inside Marcel Duchamp's famous urinal, "to tell you about the schism between Minimalism and Cubism."

Postmodern, but not post-culture war. Unlike the Reverend Jerry Falwell, who publicly voiced his suspicions of the purse-swinging Teletubby, Tinky Winky, James Dobson never actually *said* that he thought SpongeBob was

The sponge is a one-man stimulus package. If consumer confidence had a face, it would be the gleaming, avid face of SpongeBob SquarePants.

gay. Nonetheless, remarks he made in early 2005 contributed to a perception that SpongeBob's closeness to his best friend, Patrick, was in the crosshairs of the Christian right.

Hillenburg modestly disavowed any subversive intentions. "We never intended them to be gay," he told Reuters. "I consider them to be almost asexual." It is Squidward, actually, tending his soufflés at home, who might be said to exhibit a certain spinsterish or curate-like gayness; SpongeBob and Patrick simply love each other very much. Steeped in the soft-edged eroticism of Freud's latency period, they gambol together through the jellyfish fields. They hold hands. They blow bubbles at each other, whispering sweet nothings into their bubble wands, exchanging wobbling orbs of pure infatuation. SpongeBob is treble, his voice pumped taut with positivity; Patrick speaks in a blubbery bass. They're Shaggy and Scooby, or Rocky and Bullwinkle: a high voice and a low voice, a classic cartoon double act turned yellow and pink and polymorphous at the bottom of the sea.

Can you imagine how attractive this is to a 7-year-old?

SpongeBob SquarePants knows its own power; deep inside the show there's even a SpongeBob-size critique of marketing going on. Bikini Bottom is periodically swept by fads and crazes, its denizens rushing around in a volatile teenybopper horde, cheering or booing or raving on the beach to shudders of Dick Dale-ish guitar. This is the *Beach Blanket Bingo* thread in the show's aesthetic, its harking-back to the first deliria of the youth market. SpongeBob and Patrick themselves are feverishly suggestible—no gimmick or promotion targeted at them can possibly miss. Patrick wears underpants emblazoned with the image of Goofy Goober, the peanut-shaped mascot of Goofy Goober's Ice Cream Party Boat. SpongeBob, awaiting delivery of his free toy from Kelp-O Cereal, stands by his mailbox for days, in a seizure of expectancy.

In *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*, it is the evil Plankton—sort of a condensed dark-green Bond villain,

minute in size but with a huge, bombastic voice—whose brand is triumphant. Having stolen the secret Krabby Patty formula from Mr. Krabs, he then enslaves the population via the distribution of free bucket helmets secretly loaded with brainwashing circuitry. "All hail Plankton!" drone the toiling masses, as fascistic monuments are erected and Bikini Bottom becomes "Planktopolis."

Is this cynicism, or a tormented irony, coming from the franchise that has given us the SpongeBob SquarePants Edgy Skateboard, and the SpongeBob SquarePants Rolling Duffel Bag, and the SpongeBob SquarePants Eyeball Speaker Dock? If so, it is an irony short-circuited by the sheer moral voltage of the sea sponge himself. Trotting along bright-hearted, laughing his spray-on headache of a laugh, he will not succumb to complication. His corner of the world is all levity. Embrace him, drained adult. Where you see his little yellow flag, salute it; it's a sign of life. **A**

James Parker is an Atlantic contributing editor.

THIS IS NO TIME TO THINK SMALL.

This is the time to think boldly. Which is why we already have a new hybrid instrument cluster to help you drive more efficiently. A new radar-based system that helps you "see" blind spots. New voice technology that can dial your phone and read text aloud! Ideas that aren't in the distant future, but are already in our cars, right now.

To see why, please visit thefordstory.com.

The details: *Driving while distracted can result in loss of vehicle control. Only use mobile phones and other devices, even with voice commands, when it is safe to do so.

IS THERE A FORMULA—some mix of love, work, and psychological adaptation—for a good life? For 72 years, researchers at Harvard have been examining this question, following 268 men who entered college in the late 1930s through war, career, marriage and divorce, parenthood and grandparenthood, and old age. Here, for the first time, a journalist gains access to the archive of one of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies in history. Its contents, as much literature as science, offer profound insight into the human condition—and into the brilliant, complex mind of the study's longtime director, George Vaillant.

WHAT MAKES US HAPPY?

By Joshua Wolf Shenk

CASE NO. 218

How's this for the good life? You're rich, and you made the dough yourself. You're well into your 80s, and have spent hardly a day in the hospital. Your wife had a cancer scare, but she's recovered and by your side, just as she's been for more than 60 years. Asked to rate the marriage on a scale of 1 to 9, where 1 is perfectly miserable and 9 is perfectly happy, you circle the highest number. You've got two good kids, grandkids too. A survey asks you: "If you had your life to live over again, what problem, if any, would you have sought help for and to whom would you have gone?" "Probably I am fooling myself," you write, "but I don't think I would want to change anything." If only we could take what you've done, reduce it to a set of rules, and apply it systematically.

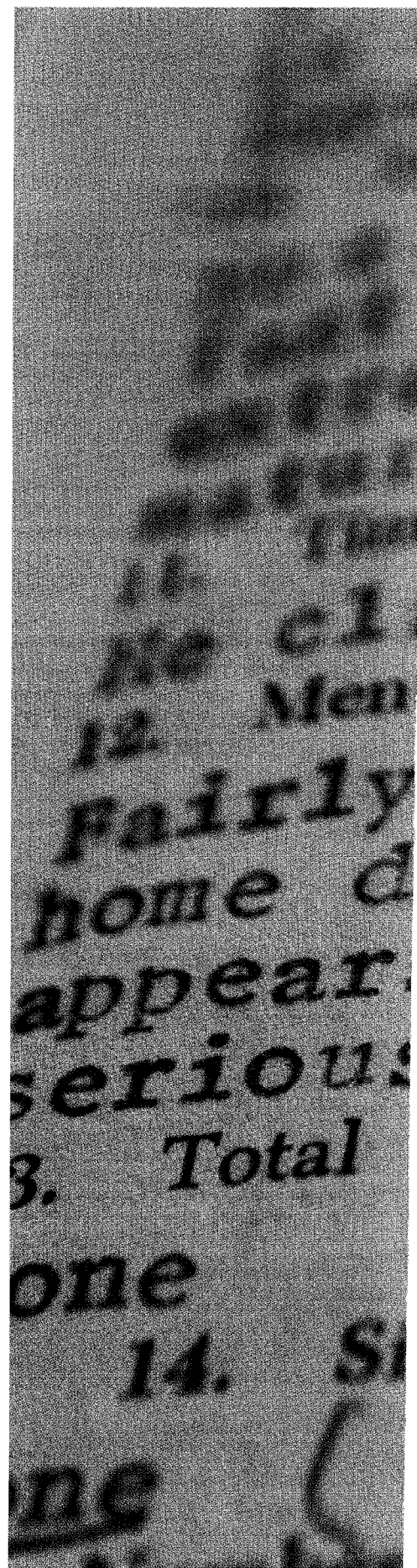
Right?

CASE NO. 47

You literally fell down drunk and died. Not quite what the study had in mind.

LAST FALL, I SPENT about a month in the file room of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, hoping to learn the secrets of the good life. The project is one of the longest-running—and probably the most exhaustive—longitudinal studies of mental and physical well-being in history. Begun in 1937 as a study of healthy, well-adjusted Harvard sophomores (all male), it has followed its subjects for more than 70 years.

MARK OSTROW



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From their days of bull sessions in Cambridge to their active duty in World War II, through marriages and divorces, professional advancement and collapse—and now well into retirement—the men have submitted to regular medical exams, taken psychological tests, returned questionnaires, and sat for interviews. The files holding the data are as thick as unabridged dictionaries. They sit in a wall of locked cabinets in an office suite behind Fenway Park in Boston, in a plain room with beige carpeting and fluorescent lights that is littered with the detritus of many decades of social-scientific inquiry: a pile of enormous spreadsheet data books; a 1970s-era typewriter; a Macintosh PowerBook, circa 1993. All that's missing are the IBM punch cards used to analyze the data in the early days.

For 42 years, the psychiatrist George Vaillant has been the chief curator of these lives, the chief investigator of their experiences, and the chief analyst of their lessons. His own life has been so woven into the study—and the study has become such a creature of his mind—that neither can be understood without the other. As Vaillant nears retirement (he's now 74), and the study survivors approach death—the roughly half still living are in their late 80s—it's a good time to examine both, and to do so, I was granted unprecedented access to case files ordinarily restricted to researchers.

As a young man, Vaillant fell in love with the longitudinal method of research, which tracks relatively small samples over long periods of time (as in Michael Apted's *Seven Up!* documentaries). In 1961, as a psychiatric resident at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, Vaillant found himself intrigued by two patients with manic depression who had 25 years earlier been diagnosed as incurable schizophrenics. Vaillant asked around for other cases of remitted schizophrenia and pulled their charts. "These records hadn't been assembled to do research," Vaillant told me recently, "but it was contemporary, real-time information, with none of the errors you get from memory or the distortions you get when you narrate history from the vantage of the present." In 1967, after similar work following up on heroin addicts, he discovered the Harvard Study, and his jaw dropped. "To be able to study lives in such depth, over so many decades," he said, "it was like looking through the Mount Palomar telescope," then the most powerful in the world. Soon after he began to work with the material, he found himself talking about the project to his psychoanalyst. Showing him the key that opened the study cabinets, Vaillant said, "I have the key to Fort Knox."

Such bravado had defined the study from the start. Arlie Bock—a brusque, no-nonsense physician who grew up in Iowa and took over the health services at Harvard University in the 1930s—conceived the project with his patron, the department-store magnate W. T. Grant. Writing in September 1938, Bock declared that medical research paid too much attention to sick people; that dividing the body up into symptoms and diseases—and viewing it through the lenses of a hundred micro-specialties—could never shed light on the urgent question of how, on the whole, to live well. His study would draw on undergraduates who could "paddle their own canoe," Bock said, and it would "attempt to analyze the forces that have produced normal young men." He defined *normal*

as "that combination of sentiments and physiological factors which in toto is commonly interpreted as successful living."

Bock assembled a team that spanned medicine, physiology, anthropology, psychiatry, psychology, and social work, and was advised by such luminaries as the psychiatrist Adolf Meyer and the psychologist Henry Murray. Combing through health data, academic records, and recommendations from the Harvard dean, they chose 268 students—mostly from the classes of 1942, '43, and '44—and measured them from every conceivable angle and with every available scientific tool.

Exhaustive medical exams noted everything from major organ function, to the measure of lactic acid after five minutes on a treadmill, to the size of the "lip seam" and the hanging length of the scrotum. Using a new test called the electroencephalograph, the study measured the electrical activity in the brain, and sought to deduce character from the squiggles. During a home visit, a social worker took not only a boy's history—when he stopped wetting his bed, how he learned about sex—but also extensive medical and social histories on his parents and extended family. The boys interpreted Rorschach inkblots, submitted handwriting samples for analysis, and talked extensively with psychiatrists. They stripped naked so that every dimension of their bodies could be measured for "anthropometric" analysis, a kind of whole-body phrenology based on the premise that stock character types could be seen from body proportions.

Inveighing against medicine's tendency to think small and specialized, Bock made big promises. He told the *Harvard Crimson* in 1942 that his study of successful men was pitched at easing "the disharmony of the world at large." One early Grant Study document compared its prospects to the accomplishments of Socrates, Galileo, and Pasteur. But in fact

the study staff remained bound by their respective disciplines and by the kinds of narrow topics that yield academic journal papers. Titles from the study's early years included "Resting-Pulse and Blood-Pressure Values in Relation to Physical Fitness in Young Men"; "Instruction Time in Certain Multiple Choice Tests"; and "Notes on Usage of Male Personal Names." Perhaps the height of the

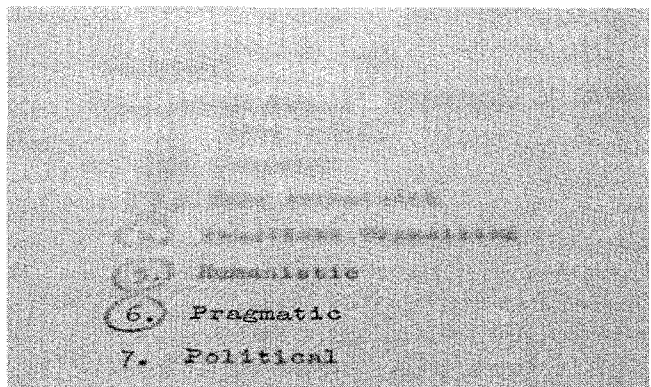
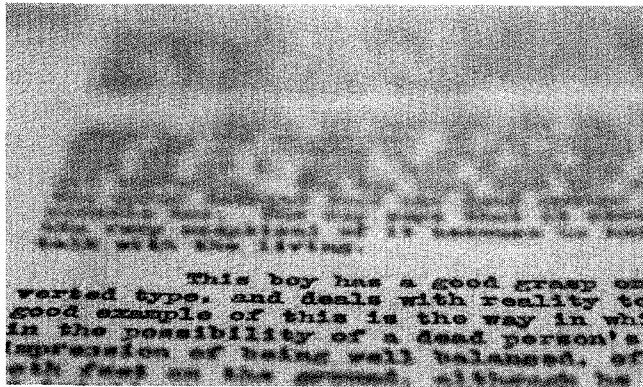
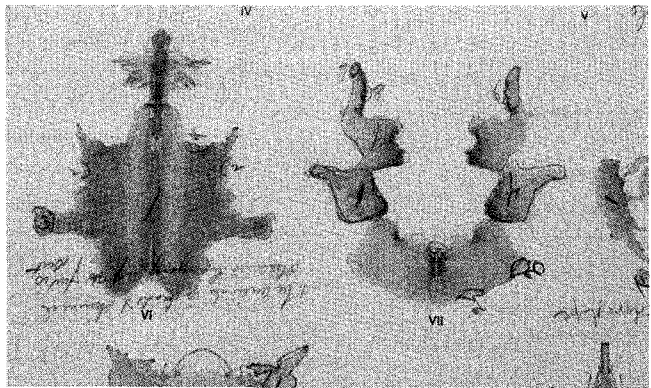
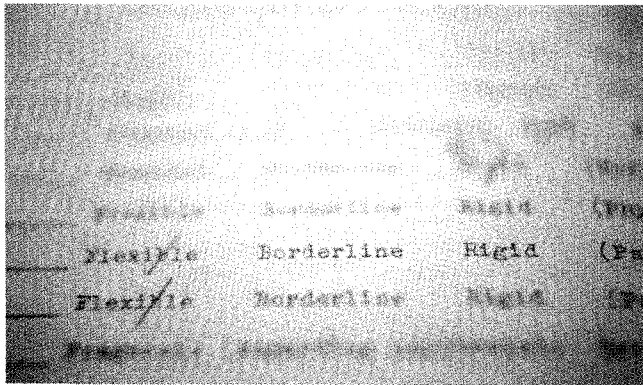
study's usefulness in its early days was to lend its methods to the military, for officer selection in World War II.

Most longitudinal studies die on the vine because funders expect results quickly. W. T. Grant was no exception. He held on for about a decade—allowing the staff to keep sending detailed annual questionnaires to the men, hold regular case conferences, and publish a flurry of papers and several books—before he stopped sending checks. By the late 1940s, the Rockefeller Foundation took an interest, funding a research anthropologist named Margaret Lantis, who visited every man she could track down (which was all but a few). But by the mid-1950s, the study was on life support. The staff, including Clark Heath, who had managed the study for Bock, scattered, and the project fell into the care of a lone Harvard Health Services psychologist, Charles McArthur. He kept it limping along—surveys dwindled to once every two years—in part by asking questions about smoking habits and cigarette-brand preferences, a nod to a new study patron, Philip Morris. One survey asked, "If you never smoked, why didn't you?"

MORE ONLINE

For interviews with surviving Grant Study subjects, visit www.theatlantic.com/grant.

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It was a far cry from Galileo.

But as Vaillant points out, longitudinal studies, like wines, improve with age. And as the Grant Study men entered middle age—they spent their 40s in the 1960s—many achieved dramatic success. Four members of the sample ran for the U.S. Senate. One served in a presidential Cabinet, and one was president. There was a best-selling novelist (not, Vaillant has revealed, Norman Mailer, Harvard class of '43). But hidden amid the shimmering successes were darker hues. As early as 1948, 20 members of the group displayed severe psychiatric difficulties. By age 50, almost a third of the men had at one time or another met Vaillant's criteria for mental illness. Underneath the tweed jackets of these Harvard elites beat troubled hearts. Arlie Bock didn't get it. "They were normal when I picked them," he told Vaillant in the 1960s. "It must have been the psychiatrists who screwed them up."

CASE NO. 141

What happened to you?

You grew up in a kind of fairy tale, in a big-city brownstone with 11 rooms and three baths. Your father practiced medicine and made a mint. When you were a college sophomore, you described him as thoughtful, funny, and patient. "Once in awhile his children get his goat," you wrote, "but he never gets sore without a cause." Your mother painted and served on prominent boards. You called her "artistic" and civic-minded.

As a child, you played all the sports, were good to your two sisters, and loved church. You and some other boys from Sunday school—it met at your house—used to study the families in your neighborhood, choosing one every year to present with Christmas baskets. When the garbageman's wife found out you had polio, she cried. But you recovered fully, that was your way.

"I could discover no problems of importance," the study's social worker concluded after seeing your family. "The atmosphere of the home is one of happiness and harmony."

At Harvard, you continued to shine. "Perhaps more than any other boy who has been in the Grant Study," the staff noted about you, "the following participant exemplifies the qualities of a superior personality: stability, intelligence, good judgment, health, high purpose, and ideals." Basically, they were in a swoon. They described you as especially likely to achieve "both external and internal satisfactions." And you seemed well on your way. After a stint in the Air Force—"the whole thing was like a game," you said—you studied for work in a helping profession. "Our lives are like the talents in the parable of the three stewards," you wrote. "It is something that has been given to us for the time being and we have the opportunity and privilege of doing our best with this precious gift."

And then what happened? You married, and took a posting overseas. You started smoking and drinking. In 1951—you were 31—you wrote, "I think the most important element that has emerged in my own psychic picture is a fuller realization of my own hostilities. In early years I used to pride myself on not having any. This was probably because they were too deeply buried and I unwilling and afraid to face them." By your mid-30s, you had basically dropped out of sight. You stopped returning questionnaires. "Please, please ... let us hear from you," Dr. Vaillant wrote you in 1967. You wrote to say you'd come see him in Cambridge, and that you'd return the last survey, but the next thing the study heard of you, you had died of a sudden disease.

Dr. Vaillant tracked down your therapist. You seemed unable to grow up, the therapist said. You had an affair with a girl he considered psychotic. You looked steadily more disheveled. You had come to see your father as overpowering and distant, your

mother as overbearing. She made you feel like a black sheep in your illustrious family. Your parents had split up, it turns out.

In your last days, you “could not settle down,” a friend told Dr. Vaillant. You “just sort of wandered,” sometimes offering ad hoc therapy groups, often sitting in peace protests. You broke out spontaneously into Greek and Latin poetry. You lived on a houseboat. You smoked dope. But you still had a beautiful sense of humor. “One of the most perplexing and charming people I have ever met in my life,” your friend said. Your obituary made you sound like a hell of a man—a war hero, a peace activist, a baseball fan.

IN ALL VAILLANT’S literature—and, by agreement, in this essay, too—the Grant Study men remain anonymous. (Even the numbers on the case studies have been changed.) A handful have publicly identified themselves—including Ben Bradlee, the longtime editor of *The Washington Post*, who opened his memoir, *A Good Life*, with his first trip to the study office. John F. Kennedy was a Grant Study man, too, though his files were long ago withdrawn from the study office and sealed until 2040. Ironically, it was the notation of that seal in the archive that allowed me to confirm JFK’s involvement, which has not been recognized publicly before now.

Of course, Kennedy—the heir to ruthless, ambitious privilege; the philanderer of “Camelot”; the paragon of casual wit and physical vigor who, backstage, suffered from debilitating illness—is no one’s idea of “normal.” And that’s the point. The study began in the spirit of laying lives out on a microscope slide. But it turned out that the lives were too big, too weird, too full of subtleties and contradictions to fit any easy conception of “successful living.” Arlie Bock had gone looking for binary conclusions—yeses and nos, dos and don’ts. But the enduring lessons would be paradoxical, not only on the substance of the men’s lives (the most inspiring triumphs were often studies in hardship) but also with respect to method: if it was to come to life, this cleaver-sharp science project would need the rounding influence of storytelling.

In George Vaillant, the Grant Study found its storyteller, and in the Grant Study, Vaillant found a set of data, and a series of texts, suited to his peculiar gifts. A tall man, with a gravelly voice, steel-gray hair, and eyes that can radiate great joy and deep sadness, Vaillant blends the regal bearing of his old-money ancestors, the emotional directness of his psychiatric colleagues, and a genial absentmindedness. (A colleague recalls one day in the 1980s when Vaillant came to the office in his slippers.)

As with many of the men he came to study, Vaillant’s gifts and talents were shaped by his needs and pains. Born in 1934, Vaillant grew up in what he described to me as “blessed circumstances”—living “during the Great Depression with a nurse, a maid, and a cook, but without anybody having so much money that you stared in dismay at the newspapers” as stock prices sagged. And his parents had a storybook romance. They met in Mexico City, where she was the daughter

of a prominent expatriate American banker and he was a hotshot archaeologist working on pre-Columbian Aztec digs. When George was 2, he says, his father “gave up being Indiana Jones and became a suit,” first as a curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and then as the director of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He was an accomplished man who, his son says, showed little trace of doubt or depression. But one Sunday afternoon in 1945, at home in Devon, Pennsylvania, George Clapp Vaillant, then 44, went out into the yard after a nap. His wife found him by the pool, a revolver next to him and a fatal wound through the mouth. His elder son and namesake, the last to see his father alive, was 10 years old.

Immediately, a curtain of silence fell around the tragedy. “In WASP fashion,” Vaillant says, “it was handled with ‘Let’s get this put away as quickly as possible.’” His mother, Suzannah Beck Vaillant, picked up the children and took them to Arizona. “We never saw our house again,” says Henry Vaillant, George’s younger brother. “We never attended the memorial service. It was just kind of a complete cutoff.”

A few years later, their father’s 25th-reunion book, hard-bound in red cloth, arrived in the mail from Harvard College. George spent days with it, spellbound by the photographs and words that showed college students morphing, over the course of a few paragraphs, into 47-year-olds. The seed of

interest in longitudinal research had been planted; it germinated decades later in Vaillant’s psychiatric residency and then in the ultimate vein of data he discovered at Harvard. It was 1967, and the Grant Study men were beginning to return for their 25th college reunions. Vaillant was 33. He would spend the rest of his career—and expects to spend the rest of his life—following these men.

The range of his training and the complexity of his own character proved to be crucial to his research. After Harvard College (where he wrote for the *Lampoon*, the humor magazine, and studied history and literature), Harvard Medical School, and a

residency at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, Vaillant studied at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute, which he calls a “temple” to Freud’s ideas. He learned the orthodoxy, which included a literary approach to human lives, bringing theory to bear through deep reading of individual cases. But he also had training in the rigors of data-driven experimental science, including a two-year fellowship at a Skinnerian laboratory, where he studied neurotransmitter levels in pigeons and monkeys. There he learned to use the behaviorist B. F. Skinner’s “cumulative behavioral recorder,” which collapses behaviors across minutes, hours, or days onto a chart to be inspected in a single sitting.

The undertones of psychoanalysis are tragic; Freud dismissed the very idea of “normality” as “an ideal fiction” and famously remarked that he hoped to transform “hysterical misery into common unhappiness.” The spirit of modern social science, by contrast, draws on a brash optimism that the secrets to life can be laid bare. Vaillant is an optimist marinated in tragedy, not just in his life experience, but in his

“To be able to study lives in such depth, over so many decades,” Vaillant says, “it was like looking through the Mount Palomar telescope.”

taste. Above his desk hangs a letter from a group of his medical residents to their successors, advising them to prepare for Vaillant's "obscure literary references" by reading Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Vaillant loves Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, too, and the cartoons of the dark humorist Charles Addams, like the one where several Christmas carolers sing merrily at the Addams family doorstep, while Morticia, Lurch, and Gomez stand on the roof, ready to tip a vat of hot oil on their heads. When his children were small, Vaillant would read them a poem about a tribe of happy-go-lucky bears, who lived in a kind of Eden until a tribe of mangier, smarter bears came along and enslaved them. "I would weep at this story," remembers his daughter Anne Vaillant. "Dad thought it was funny, and I think somehow it was helpful to him that I had such feelings about it. There was this sort of, 'This is the way life is.'"

Yet, even as he takes pleasure in poking holes in an innocent idealism, Vaillant says his hopeful temperament is best summed up by the story of a father who on Christmas Eve puts into one son's stocking a fine gold watch, and into another son's, a pile of horse manure. The next morning, the first boy comes to his father and says glumly, "Dad, I just don't know what I'll do with this watch. It's so fragile. It could break." The other boy runs to him and says, "Daddy! Daddy! Santa left me a pony, if only I can just find it!"

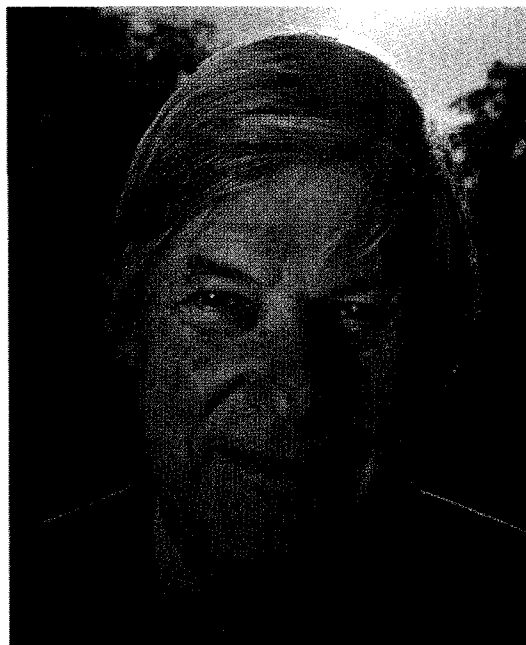
The story gets to the heart of Vaillant's angle on the Grant Study. His central question is not how much or how little trouble these men met, but rather precisely how—and to what effect—they responded to that trouble. His main interpretive lens has been the psychoanalytic metaphor of "adaptations," or unconscious responses to pain, conflict, or uncertainty. Formalized by Anna Freud on the basis of her father's work, adaptations (also called "defense mechanisms") are unconscious thoughts and behaviors that you could say either shape or distort—depending on whether you approve or disapprove—a person's reality.

Vaillant explains defenses as the mental equivalent of a basic biological process. When we cut ourselves, for example, our blood clots—a swift and involuntary response that maintains homeostasis. Similarly, when we encounter a challenge large or small—a mother's death or a broken shoelace—our defenses float us through the emotional swamp. And just as clotting can save us from bleeding to death—or plug a coronary artery and lead to a heart attack—defenses can spell our redemption or ruin. Vaillant's taxonomy ranks defenses from worst to best, in four categories.

At the bottom of the pile are the unhealthiest, or "psychotic," adaptations—like paranoia, hallucination, or megalomania—which, while they can serve to make reality tolerable for the person employing them, seem crazy to anyone else. One level up are the "immature" adaptations, which include acting out, passive aggression, hypochondria, projection, and fantasy. These aren't as isolating as psychotic adaptations, but they impede intimacy. "Neurotic" defenses are common in "normal" people. These include intellectualization (mutating the primal stuff of life into objects of formal thought); disso-

ciation (intense, often brief, removal from one's feelings); and repression, which, Vaillant says, can involve "seemingly inexplicable naïveté, memory lapse, or failure to acknowledge input from a selected sense organ." The healthiest, or "mature," adaptations include altruism, humor, anticipation (looking ahead and planning for future discomfort), suppression (a conscious decision to postpone attention to an impulse or conflict, to be addressed in good time), and sublimation (finding outlets for feelings, like putting aggression into sport, or lust into courtship).

In contrast to Anna Freud, who located the origins of defenses in the sexual conflicts of a child, Vaillant sees adaptations as arising organically from the pain of experience and playing out through the whole



Now 74, George Vaillant has dedicated his career since 1967 to following the men of the Grant Study.

lifespan. Take his comparison of two Grant Study men, whom he named "David Goodhart" and "Carlton Tarrytown" in his first book on the study, *Adaptation to Life*, published in 1977. Both men grew up fearful and lonely. Goodhart was raised in a blue-collar family, had a bigoted, alcoholic father, and a mother he described as "very nervous, irritable, anxious, and a worrier." Tarrytown was richer, and was raised in a wealthy suburb, but he also had an alcoholic father, and his mother was so depressed that he feared she would commit suicide. Goodhart went on to become a national leader on civil-rights issues—a master, Vaillant argued, of the "mature" defenses of sublimation and altruism. By his late 40s, staff researchers using independent ratings put Goodhart in the top fifth of the Grant Study in psychological adjustment. Tarrytown, meanwhile, was in the bottom fifth. A doctor who left a regular practice to work for the state, a three-time divorcee who anesthetized his pain with alcohol and sedatives, Tarrytown was, Vaillant said, a user of dissociation and projection—"neurotic" and "immature" defenses, respectively. After a relapse into drug abuse, Tarrytown killed himself at 53. Goodhart lived to 70. Though Vaillant says that the "dashing major" of midlife became a stolid and portly brigadier general, Goodhart's obituaries still celebrated a hero of civil rights.

ESCALADE *HYBRID*

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Most psychology preoccupies itself with mapping the heavens of health in sharp contrast to the underworld of illness. "Social anxiety disorder" is distinguished from shyness. Depression is defined as errors in cognition. Vaillant's work, in contrast, creates a refreshing conversation about health and illness as weather patterns in a common space. "Much of what is labeled mental illness," Vaillant writes, "simply reflects our 'unwise' deployment of defense mechanisms. If we use defenses well, we are deemed mentally healthy, conscientious, funny, creative, and altruistic. If we use them badly, the psychiatrist diagnoses us ill, our neighbors label us unpleasant, and society brands us immoral."

This perspective is shaped by a long-term view. Whereas clinicians focus on treating a problem at any given time, Vaillant is more like a biographer, looking to make sense of a whole life—or, to take an even broader view, like an anthropologist or naturalist looking to capture an era. The good news, he argues, is that diseases—and people, too—have a "natural history." After all, many of the "psychotic" adaptations are common in toddlers, and the "immature" adaptations are essential in later childhood, and they often fade with maturity. As adolescents, the Grant Study men were twice as likely to use immature defenses as mature ones, but in middle life they were four times as likely to use mature defenses—and the progress continued into old age. When they were between 50 and 75, Vaillant found, altruism and humor grew more prevalent, while all the immature defenses grew more rare.

This means that a glimpse of any one moment in a life can be deeply misleading. A man at 20 who appears the model of altruism may turn out to be a kind of emotional prodigy—or he may be ducking the kind of engagement with reality that his peers are both moving toward and defending against. And, on the other extreme, a man at 20 who appears impossibly wounded may turn out to be gestating toward maturity.

Such was the case, Vaillant argues, with "Dr. Godfrey Minot Camille," a poetic and troubled young man who spent so much time at the Harvard infirmary complaining of vague symptoms that a college physician declared, "This boy is becoming a regular psychoneurotic." He'd grown up in a frigid environment—he ate his meals alone until age 6—and spoke of his desolation with heartbreaking clarity. A member of the study staff advised him: "When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hold on." He replied: "But the knot was tied so long ago, and I have been hanging on tight for such a long time." After graduating from medical school, he attempted suicide.

With the help of psychotherapy and with the passage of time, his hypochondria eased and he began to show "displacement," the strategy of shifting preoccupations from a painful source to more neutral ground. When his sister died, he sent her autopsy report to the Grant Study office, with a cool note saying that he expected it would be "an item of news." He reported another family death this way: "I received an inheritance from my mother."

For Camille, such detached neutrality seemed to herald progress. At 35, he spent 14 months in a hospital for an infection and had what he described as a spiritual awakening. "Someone with a capital 'S' cared about me," he wrote. Afterward, he bloomed as a psychiatrist, channeling his own

needs into service. He said he liked the "distant closeness" of psychotherapy—and liked getting paid for it. As a child, he had fantasized about being a minister or physician. "Finally, at age forty, wish became behavior," Vaillant wrote.

In his 2002 book, *Aging Well*, Vaillant returned to this man's story, this time calling him "Ted Merton" to emphasize his spiritual development. (The men in Vaillant's books always have florid pseudonyms—Horace Lamb, Frederick Lion, Bill Loman, etc.) In several vignettes in the book, Vaillant presents Merton as an exemplar of how mature adaptations are a real-life alchemy, a way of turning the dross of emotional crises, pain, and deprivation into the gold of human connection, accomplishment, and creativity. "Such mechanisms are analogous to the involuntary grace by which an oyster, coping with an irritating grain of sand, creates a pearl," he writes. "Humans, too, when confronted with irritants, engage in unconscious but often creative behavior."

But "creative" doesn't equate to ease. At ages 55 and 60, Merton had severe depressions. In the first instance he was hospitalized. The second instance coincided with his second divorce, and "he lost not only his wife, his savings, and his job, but even his network of professional colleagues." Going forth into the breach of life can deepen meaning, but also deepen wounds.

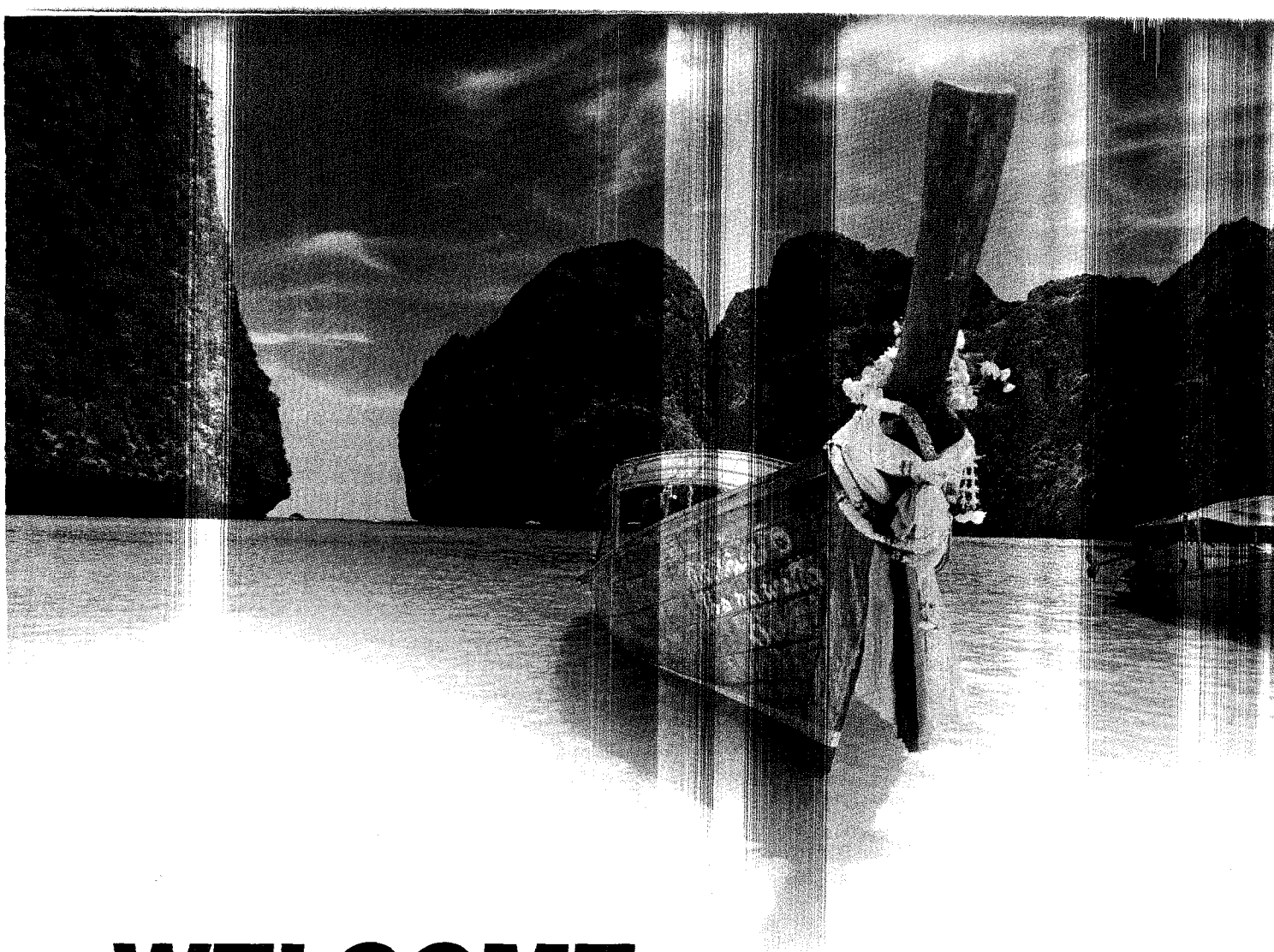
CASE NO. 158

An attractive, amiable boy from a working-class background, you struck the study staff as happy, stable, and sociable. "My general impression is that this boy will be normal and well-adjusted—rather dynamic and positive," the psychiatrist reported.

After college, you got an advanced degree and began to climb the rungs in your profession. You married a terrific girl, and you two played piano together for fun. You eventually had five kids. Asked about your work in education, you said, "What I am doing is not work; it is fun. I know what real work is like." Asked at age 25 whether you had "any personal problems or emotional conflicts (including sexual)," you answered, "No ... As Plato or some of your psychiatrists might say, I am at present just 'riding the wave.'" You come across in your files as smart, sensible, and hard-working. "This man has always kept a pleasant face turned toward the world," Dr. Heath noted after a visit from you in 1949. From your questionnaire that year, he got "a hint ... that everything has not been satisfactory" at your job. But you had no complaints. After interviewing you at your 25th reunion, Dr. Vaillant described you as a "solid guy."

Two years later, at 49, you were running a major institution. The strain showed immediately. Asked for a brief job description, you wrote: "RESPONSIBLE (BLAMED) FOR EVERYTHING." You added, "No matter what I do ... I am wrong ... We are just ducks in a shooting gallery. Any duck will do." On top of your job troubles, your mother had a stroke, and your wife developed cancer. Three years after you started the job, you resigned before you could be fired. You were 52, and you never worked again. (You kept afloat with income from stock in a company you'd done work for, and a pension.)

Seven years later, Dr. Vaillant spoke with you: "He continued to obsess ... about his resignation," he wrote. Four years later, you returned to the subject "in an obsessional way." Four



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years later still: "It seemed as if all time had stopped" for you when you resigned. "At times I wondered if there was anybody home," Dr. Vaillant wrote. Your first wife had died, and you treated your second wife "like a familiar old shoe," he said.

But you called yourself happy. When you were 74, the questionnaire asked: "Have you ever felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?" and gave the options "All of the time, some of the time, none of the time." You circled "None of the time." "Have you felt calm and peaceful?" You circled "All of the time." Two years later, the study asked: "Many people hope to become wiser as they grow older. Would you give an example of a bit of wisdom you acquired and how you came by it?" You wrote that, after having polio and diphtheria in childhood, "I never gave up hope that I could compete again. Never expect you will fail. Don't cry, if you do."

WHAT ALLOWS PEOPLE to work, and love, as they grow old? By the time the Grant Study men had entered retirement, Vaillant, who had then been following them for a quarter century, had identified seven major factors that predict healthy aging, both physically and psychologically.

Employing mature adaptations was one. The others were education, stable marriage, not smoking, not abusing alcohol, some exercise, and healthy weight. Of the 106 Harvard men who had five or six of these factors in their favor at age 50, half ended up at 80 as what Vaillant called "happy-well" and only 7.5 percent as "sad-sick." Meanwhile, of the men who had three or fewer of the health factors at age 50, none ended up "happy-well" at 80. Even if they had been in adequate physical shape at 50, the men who had three or fewer protective factors were three times as likely to be dead at 80 as those with four or more factors.

What factors don't matter? Vaillant identified some surprises. Cholesterol levels at age 50 have nothing to do with health in old age. While social ease correlates highly with good psychosocial adjustment in college and early adulthood, its significance diminishes over time. The predictive importance of childhood temperament also diminishes over time: shy, anxious kids tend to do poorly in young adulthood, but by age 70, are just as likely as the outgoing kids to be "happy-well." Vaillant sums up: "If you follow lives long enough, the risk factors for healthy life adjustment change. There is an age to watch your cholesterol and an age to ignore it."

The study has yielded some additional subtle surprises. Regular exercise in college predicted late-life *mental* health better than it did physical health. And depression turned out to be a major drain on *physical* health: of the men who were diagnosed with depression by age 50, more than 70 percent had died or were chronically ill by 63. More broadly, pessimists seemed to suffer physically in comparison with optimists, perhaps because they're less likely to connect with others or care for themselves.

More than 80 percent of the Grant Study men served in World War II, a fact that allowed Vaillant to study the effect of combat. The men who survived heavy fighting developed more chronic physical illnesses and died sooner than those who saw little or no combat, he found. And "severity of trauma is the best predictor of who is likely to develop PTSD." (This may sound obvious, but it countered the claim that post-traumatic stress disorder was just the manifestation of preexisting troubles.) He also found that personality traits assigned by the psychiatrists in the initial interviews largely predicted who would become Democrats (descriptions included "sensitive," "cultural," and "introspective") and Republicans ("pragmatic" and "organized").

Again and again, Vaillant has returned to his major preoccupations. One is alcoholism, which he found is probably the horse, and not the cart, of pathology. "People often say, 'That poor man. His wife left him and he's taken to drink,'" Vaillant says. "But when you look closely, you see that he's begun to drink, and that has helped drive his wife away." The horrors of drink so preoccupied Vaillant that he devoted a stand-alone study to it: *The Natural History of Alcoholism*.

Vaillant's other main interest is the power of relationships. "It is social aptitude," he writes, "not intellectual brilliance or parental social class, that leads to successful aging." Warm connections are necessary—and if not found in a mother or father, they can come from siblings, uncles, friends, mentors. The men's relationships at age 47, he found, predicted late-life adjustment better than any other variable, except defenses. Good sibling relationships seem especially powerful: 93 percent of the men who were thriving at age 65 had been close to a brother or sister when younger. In an interview in the March 2008 newsletter to the Grant Study subjects, Vaillant was asked, "What have you learned from the Grant Study men?" Vaillant's response: "That the only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people."

The authority of these findings stems in large part from the rarity of the source. Few longitudinal studies survive in good health for whole lifetimes, because funding runs dry and the participants drift away. Vaillant managed, drawing on federal grants and private gifts, to finance surveys every two years,

physicals every five years, and interviews every 15 years. The original study social worker, Lewis Gregory Davies, helped him goad the subjects to stay in touch, but it wasn't a hard sell. The Grant Study men saw themselves as part of an elite club.

Vaillant also dramatically expanded his scope by taking over a defunct study of juvenile delinquents in inner-city Boston, run by the criminologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck. Launched in 1939, the study had a control group of nondelinquent boys who grew up in similar circumstances—children of poor, mostly foreign-born parents, about half of whom lived in a home without a tub or a shower. In the 1970s, Vaillant and his staff tracked down most of these nondelinquent boys—it took years—so that today the Harvard Study of

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Adult Development consists of two cohorts, the “Grant men” and the “Glueck men.” Vaillant also arranged to interview a group of women from the legendary Stanford Terman study, which in the 1920s began to follow a group of high-IQ kids in California.

In contrast to the Grant data, the Glueck study data suggested that industriousness in childhood—as indicated by such things as whether the boys had part-time jobs, took on chores, or joined school clubs or sports teams—predicted adult mental health better than any other factor, including family cohesion and warm maternal relationships. “What we do,” Vaillant concluded, “affects how we feel just as much as how we feel affects what we do.”

Interestingly, while the Glueck men were 50 percent more likely to become dependent on alcohol than the Harvard men, the ones who did were more than twice as likely to eventually get sober. “The difference has nothing to do with treatment, intelligence, self-care, or having something to lose,” Vaillant told *Harvard* magazine. “It does have to do with hitting bottom. Someone sleeping under the elevated-train tracks can at some point recognize that he’s an alcoholic, but the guy getting stewed every night at a private club may not.”

But Vaillant has largely played down the distinctions among the samples. For example, while he allows that, in mortality rates, the inner-city men at age 68 to 70 resembled the Terman and Harvard cohorts at 78 to 80, he says that most of the difference can be explained by less education, more obesity, and greater abuse of alcohol and cigarettes. “When these four variables were controlled,” he writes, “their much lower parental social class, IQ, and current income were not important.” But of course those are awfully significant variables to “control.” Vaillant points out that at age 70, the inner-city men who graduated from college were just as healthy as the Harvard men. But only 29 Glueck men did finish college—about 6 percent of the sample.

Having survived so many eras, the Grant Study is a palimpsest of the modern history of medicine and psychology, each respective era’s methods and preoccupations inscribed atop the preceding ones. In the 1930s, Arlie Bock’s work was influenced by the movement called “constitutional medicine,” which started as a holistic reaction to the minimalism engendered by Pasteur and germ theory. Charles McArthur, who picked up the study in the mid-1950s, was principally interested in matching people to suitable careers through psychological testing—perfect for the *Man in the Gray*

GALLERY Stroking Won’t Boost Economy by Peter Arkle



Gift shop window. East Village, Manhattan.

Flannel Suit era. Vaillant’s use of statistical technique to justify psychoanalytic claims reflected the mode of late-1960s academic psychiatry, and his work caught on in the 1970s as part of a trend emphasizing adult development. Gail Sheehy’s 1976 best seller, *Passages*, drew on the Grant Study, as well as on the research of Daniel Levinson, who went on to publish *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*. (Sheehy was sued for alleged plagiarism by another academic, Roger Gould, who later published his own take on adult development in *Transformations*; Gould’s case was settled out of court.)

As Freud was displaced by biological psychiatry and cognitive psychology—and the massive data sets and double-blind trials that became the industry standard—Vaillant’s work risked obsolescence. But in the late 1990s, a tide called “positive psychology” came in, and lifted his boat. Driven by a savvy, brilliant psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania named Martin Seligman, the movement to create a scientific study of the good life has spread wildly through academia

and popular culture (dozens of books, a cover story in *Time*, attention from Oprah, etc.).

Vaillant became a kind of godfather to the field, and a champion of its message that psychology can improve ordinary lives, not just treat disease. But in many ways, his role in the movement is as provocateur. Last October, I watched him give a lecture to Seligman's graduate students on the power of positive emotions—awe, love, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, joy, hope, and trust (or faith). “The happiness books say, ‘Try happiness. You’ll like it a lot more than misery’—which is perfectly true,” he told them. But why, he asked, do people tell psychologists they’d cross the street to avoid someone who had given them a compliment the previous day?

In fact, Vaillant went on, positive emotions make us *more* vulnerable than negative ones. One reason is that they’re future-oriented. Fear and sadness have immediate payoffs—protecting us from attack or attracting resources at times of distress. Gratitude and joy, over time, will yield better health and deeper connections—but in the short term actually put us at risk. That’s because, while negative emotions tend to be insulating, positive emotions expose us to the common elements of rejection and heartbreak.

To illustrate his point, he told a story about one of his “prize” Grant Study men, a doctor and well-loved husband. “On his 70th birthday,” Vaillant said, “when he retired from the faculty of medicine, his wife got hold of his patient list and secretly wrote to many of his longest-running patients, ‘Would you write a letter of appreciation?’ And back came 100 single-spaced, desperately loving letters—often with pictures attached. And she put them in a lovely presentation box covered with Thai silk, and gave it to him.” Eight years later, Vaillant interviewed the man, who proudly pulled the box down from his shelf. “George, I don’t know what you’re going to make of this,” the man said, as he began to cry, “but I’ve never read it.” “It’s very hard,” Vaillant said, “for most of us to tolerate being loved.”

Vaillant brings a healthy dose of subtlety to a field that sometimes seems to glide past it. The bookstore shelves are lined with titles that have an almost messianic tone, as in *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*. But what does it mean, really, to be happier? For 30 years, Denmark has topped international happiness surveys. But Danes are hardly a sanguine bunch. Ask an American how it’s going, and you will usually hear “Really good.” Ask a Dane, and you will hear “*Det kunne være værre* (It could be worse).” “Danes have consistently low (and indubitably realistic) expectations for the year to come,” a team of Danish scholars concluded. “Year after year they are pleasantly surprised to find that not everything is getting more rotten in the state of Denmark.”

Of course, happiness scientists have come up with all kinds of straightforward, and actionable, findings: that money does little to make us happier once our basic needs are met; that marriage and faith lead to happiness (or it could be that happy people are more likely to be married and

spiritual); that temperamental “set points” for happiness—a predisposition to stay at a certain level of happiness—account for a large, but not overwhelming, percentage of our well-being. (Fifty percent, says Sonja Lyubomirsky in *The How of Happiness*. Circumstances account for 10 percent, and the other 40 percent is within our control.) But why do countries with the highest self-reports of subjective well-being also yield the most suicides? How is it that children are often found to be a source of “negative affect” (sadness, anger)—yet people identify children as their greatest source of pleasure?

The questions are unresolved, in large part because of method. The psychologist Ed Diener, at the University of Illinois, has helped lay the empirical foundation for positive

psychology, drawing most recently on data from the Gallup World Poll, which interviewed a representative sample of 360,000 people from 145 countries. “You can say a lot of general things from these data that you could never say before,” Diener says. “But many of them are relatively shallow. People who go to church report more joy. But if you ask why, we don’t know. George has these small samples—and they’re Harvard men, my goodness, not so generalizable. Yet he has deep data, and he brings so many things together at once.”

Seligman describes Diener as the “engineer” of positive psychology, “trying to do better, more replicable, more transparent science.” Vaillant and his work, though, remind

Seligman of the roots of psychology—the study of the soul. “To practice scientific psychology is to have as few premises as you can, to account for as much of the soul as you can get away with,” Seligman says. “Everyone in positive psychology who seeks to explain the mysteries of the psyche wants deeper stuff. George is the poet of this movement. He makes us aware that we’re yearning for deeper stuff.”

When Vaillant told me he was going to speak to Seligman’s class, he said his message would be from William Blake: “Joy and woe are woven fine.” Earlier in his career, he would use such occasions to demonstrate, with stories and data, the bright side of pain—how adaptations can allow us to turn dross into gold. Now he articulates the dark side of pleasure and connection—or, at least, the way that our most profound yearnings can arise from our most basic fears.

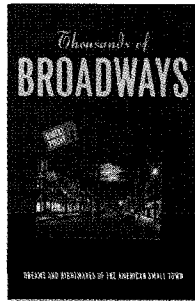
CASE NO. 218, CONTINUED

On first glance, you are the study’s exemplar. In Dr. Vaillant’s “decathlon” of mental health—10 measures, taken at various points between ages 18 and 80, including personality stability at ages 21 and 29, and social supports at 70—you have ranked in the top 10 of the Grant Study men the entire way through, one of only three men to have done so.

What’s your secret? Is it your steely resolve? After a major accident in college, you returned to campus in a back brace, but you looked healthy. You had a kind of emotional steel, too. When you were 13, your mother ran off with your father’s best friend. And though your parents reunited two years later, a pall of disquiet hung over your three-room apartment when

“It is social aptitude, not intellectual brilliance or social class, that leads to successful aging.” Relationships matter more than anything else.

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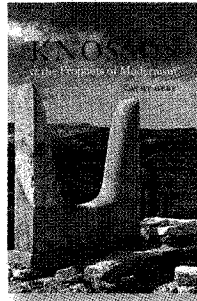
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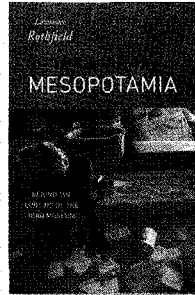


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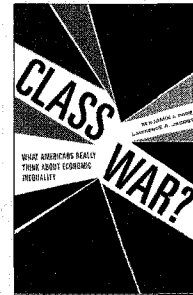
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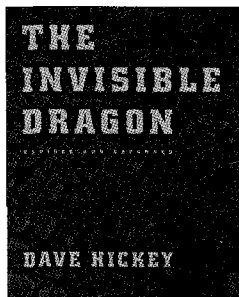
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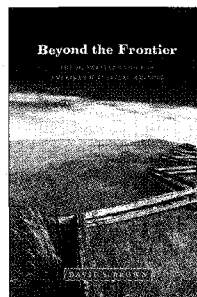
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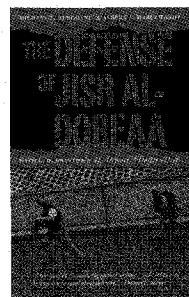
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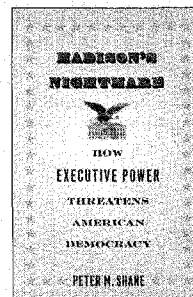
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—*Reed Hundt, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission*

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the social worker came for her visit. But you said your parents' divorce was "just like in the movies," and that you someday "would like to have some marital difficulties" of your own.

After the war—during which you worked on a major weapons system—and graduate school, you married, and your bond with your wife only deepened over time. Indeed, while your mother remains a haunting presence in your surveys—eventually diagnosed with manic depression, she was often hospitalized and received many courses of shock therapy—the warmth of your relationship with your wife and kids, and fond memories of your maternal grandfather, seemed to sustain you.

Yet your file shows a quiet, but persistent, questioning about a path not taken. As a sophomore in college, you emphasized how much money you wanted to make, but also wondered whether you'd be better off in medicine. After the war, you said you were "too tense & high strung" and had less interest in money than before. At 33, you said, "If I had to do it all over again I am positive I would have gone into medicine—but it's a little late." At 44, you sold your business and talked about teaching high school. You regretted that (according to a study staff

member's notes) you'd "made no real contribution to humanity." At 74, you said again that if you could do it over again, you would go into medicine. In fact, you said, your father had urged you to do it, to avoid the Army. "That annoyed me," you said, and so you went another way.

There is something unreachable in your file. "Probably I am fooling myself," you wrote in 1987, at age 63, "but I don't think I would want to change anything." How can we know if you're fooling yourself? How can even you know? According to Dr. Vaillant's model of adaptations, the very way we deal with reality is by distorting it—and we do this unconsciously. When we start pulling at this thread, an awfully big spool of thoughts and questions begins to unravel onto the floor.

You never seemed to pull the thread. When the study asked you to indicate "some of the fundamental beliefs, concepts, philosophy of life or articles of faith which help carry you along or tide you over rough spots," you wrote: "Hard to answer since I am really not too introspective. However, I have an overriding sense (or philosophy) that it's all a big nothing—or 'chasing after wind' as it says in Ecclesiastes & therefore, at least up to the present, nothing has caused me too much grief."

CASE NO. 47, CONTINUED

You are the study's antihero, its jester, its subversive philosopher. From the first pages of your file, you practically explode with personality. In the social worker's office, you laughed uproariously, slapping your arm against your chair. He "seems to be thoroughly delighted with the family idiosyncrasies," Lewis Gregory, the original staff social worker, wrote. "He has a delightful, spontaneous sense of humor ... [a] bubbling, effervescent quality." "My family considers it a great joke that I am a 'normal boy,'" you wrote. "'Good God!'"

You ducked the war, as a conscientious objector. "I've answered a great many questions," you wrote in your 1946 survey. "Now I'd like to ask you people a couple of questions. By what standards of reason are you calling people 'adjusted' these days? Happy? Contented? Hopeful? If people have adjusted to a society that seems hell-bent on destroying itself in the next couple of decades, just what does that prove about the people?"

You got married young, and did odd jobs—including a stint as a guinea pig in a hospital study on shipwreck survival. You said that you were fascinated by the "nuts" on the psychiatric ward, and you wondered whether you could escape the "WASP cocoon." You worked in public relations and had three kids.

You said you wanted to be a writer, but that looked like a distant dream. You started drinking. In college, you had said you were the life of the party without alcohol. By 1948, you were drinking sherry. In 1951, you reported that you regularly took a few drinks. By 1964, you wrote, "Really tie one on about twice a week," and you continued, "Well, I eat too much, smoke too much, drink too much liquor and coffee, get too little exercise, and I've got to do something about all these things. "On the

other hand," you wrote, "I've never been more productive, and I'm a little wary of rocking the boat right now by going on a clean living kick ... I'm about as adjusted and effective as the average Fine Upstanding Neurotic can hope to be."

After a divorce, and a move across the country, and a second marriage—you left her for a mistress who later left you—you came out of the closet. And you began to publish and write full-time. The Grant Study got some of your best work. When a questionnaire asked what ideas carried you through rough spots, you wrote, "It's important to care and to try, even tho the effects of one's caring and trying may be absurd, futile, or so woven into the future as to be undetectable." Asked what effect the Grant Study had on you, you wrote, "Just one more little token that I am God's Elect. And I really don't need any such tokens, thank you."

In the early 1970s, Dr. Vaillant came to see you in your small apartment, with an old couch, an old-fashioned typewriter, a sink full of dishes, and a Harvard-insignia chair in the corner. Ever the conscientious objector, you asked for his definition of "normality." You said you loved *The Sorrow and the Pity* and that, in the movie, the sort of men the Grant Study prized fought on the side of the Nazis, "whereas the kooks and the homosexuals were all in the resistance." You told Dr. Vaillant he should read Joseph Heller on the unrelieved tragedy of conventionally successful businessmen.

Your "mental status was paradoxical," Dr. Vaillant wrote in his notes. You were clearly depressed, he observed, and yet full of joy and vitality. "He could have been a resistance leader," Dr. Vaillant wrote. "He really did seem free about himself." Intrigued, and puzzled, he sent you a portion of his manuscript-in-progress, wanting your thoughts. "The data's fantastic," you replied. "The methodology you are using is highly sophisticated. But the end judgments, the final assessments, seem simplistic."

"I mean, I can imagine some poor bastard who's fulfilled all your criteria for successful adaptation to life, ... upon retirement to some aged enclave near Tampa just staring out over the ocean waiting for the next attack of chest pain, and wondering what he's missed all his life ... What's the difference between a guy who at his final conscious moments before death has a nostalgic grin on his face as if to say, 'Boy, I sure squeezed that lemon' and the other man who fights for every last breath in an effort to turn back time to some nagging unfinished business?"

You went on to a very productive career, and became an important figure in the gay-rights movement. You softened toward your parents and children, and made peace with your ex-wife. You took long walks. And you kept drinking. After a day in your "collar," you said, you let the dog loose.

"If you had your life to live over again," the study asked you in 1981, "what problem, if any, would you have sought help for and to whom would you have gone?" "I've come to believe that 'help' is for the most part useless and destructive," you answered. "Can you imagine Arlie Bock—God bless his soul—trying to help me work out my problems? ... Or Clark Heath? The poor old boys would have headed for the hills!

The 'helping professions' are in general camp-followers of the dominant culture, just like the clergy, and the psychiatrists. (I except Freud and Vaillant.)"

Around this time, Dr. Vaillant wrote about you: "The debate continues in my mind, whether he is going to be the exception and be able to break all the rules of mental health and alcoholism or whether the Greek fates will destroy him. Only time will tell." Dr. Vaillant urged you to go to AA. You died at age 64, when you fell down the stairs of your apartment building. The autopsy found high levels of alcohol in your blood.

In *Adaptation to Life*, where you appeared as "Alan Poe," Vaillant had admired your altruism and sublimation, and your eloquence, but worried you were "stalked by death, suicide and skid row." You had written in retort, "Of course, the prognosis of death is a pretty sure bet ... Hell, I could be dead by the time you get this letter. But if I am, let it be published ... that—especially in the last five years—I sure squeezed that lemon!"

CAN THE GOOD life be accounted for with a set of rules? Can we even say who has a "good life" in any broad way? At times, Vaillant wears his lab coat and lays out his findings matter-of-factly. ("As a means of uncovering truth," he wrote in *Adaptation to Life*, "the experimental method is superior to intuition.") More often, he speaks from a literary and philosophical perspective. (In the same chapter, he wrote of the men, "Their lives were too human for science, too beautiful for numbers, too sad for diagnosis and too immortal for bound journals.") In one of my early conversations with him, he described the study files as hundreds of *Brothers Karamazovs*. Later, after taking a stab at answering several Big Questions I had asked him—*Do people change?*

What does the study teach us about the good life?—he said to me, "Why don't you tell me when you have time to come up to Boston and read one of these Russian novels?"

Indeed, the lives themselves—dramatic, pathetic, inspiring, exhausting—resonate on a frequency that no data set could tune to. The physical material—wispy sheets from carbon copies; ink from fountain pens—has a texture. You can hear the men's voices, not only in their answers, but in their silences, as they stride through time both personal (masturbation reports give way to reports on children; career plans give way to retirement plans) and historical (did they vote for

Dewey or Truman?; "What do you think about today's student protesters, drug users, hippies, etc.?). Secrets come out. One man did not acknowledge to himself until he reached his late 70s that he was gay. With this level of intimacy and depth, the lives do become worthy of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky.

George Vaillant has not been just the principal reader of these novels. To a large extent, he is the author. He framed most of the questions; he conducted most of the interviews, which exist, not in recordings or transcripts, but only in his notes and interpretations. To explain the study, I needed to understand him, and how the themes from his life circled back to inform his work (and vice versa).

The men's lives are worthy of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. One man acknowledged to himself only in his late 70s that he was gay.

Strenuous defenses, I came to see, are no mere academic theme for Vaillant, who has molded his life story like so much clay. Consider the story of his father's suicide and his own delight in going through the 25th-reunion book as a 13-year-old. When I asked Vaillant if the experience of paging through the book had been tinged with sadness, he said, "It was fascinating," and went on to describe his awe and wonder at longitudinal studies. If he were observing his own case, Vaillant himself would probably call this "reaction formation"—responding to anxiety (pain at grasping a father's violent departure) with an opposite tendency (joy at watching men, quite like him, develop through time).

But Vaillant's sister, Joanna Settle, described their father's death as the "North Star" essential for navigating her brother's story. Henry Vaillant, George's brother, agreed. "Since that time," he said, "it was as if George wanted to do two things. He wanted to surpass our father, and he also wanted to find out who our father was."

Considering the Harvard study through the lens of Vaillant's adaptations, one wonders whether he looked to do both at once. Henry Vaillant says that their father was depressed and drinking heavily at the time of his suicide; afterward, he says, his mother propagated the "heroic myth" that their father—who had worked for the U.S. Embassy in wartime Peru and, at the time of his death, was set to join the Office of War Information—was a war casualty, undone by the pressure. Does this help explain George Vaillant's deep interest in alcoholism, and in the psychological impact of combat?

"I sometimes wondered if another motivation for the study of these lives," says Henry Vaillant, was "to learn how to live

his own life right. As if by interviewing all these very successful people, he would get the knack. And of course in many ways, he has the knack."

Indeed, Vaillant's work is widely read and cited; he travels the world speaking to adoring audiences ("the leisure of the theoried class," he calls it); his colleagues and students marvel at his capacity for empathy and connection. "George sees the best in people," Martin Seligman says, "and he brings out the best in people."

I saw this firsthand in Vaillant's work with H'Sien Hayward, a second-year doctoral student in psychology at Harvard with a penetrating analytical mind and a big heart. Hayward has been paraplegic and bound to a wheelchair since a car accident at 16. She studies "post-traumatic growth," the surprising beneficial changes that many people experience after pain or injury. She approached Vaillant on a lark—she never thought someone so famous would have time to advise her. She was shocked, she told me, to see that he insisted on talking about *her* ideas—and about the pains and hopes that gave rise to them. "The only way to keep it is to give it away," he told her, articulating and enacting the essence of altruism.

The experience, Hayward said, was "transformative." Frustrated by academic politics when she came to work with him, she told me, "I felt like a little bird with a broken wing, and he lifted me back up and mended me and made me fall back in love with behavioral science—using science to understand humans and all of their complexity." Hayward came to consider Vaillant as "the embodiment of healthy aging—mentally, emotionally, and everything. He's the person we'd all hope to end up to be."

But Vaillant's closest friends and family tell a very different story, of a man plagued by distance and strife in his relationships. "George is someone who holds things in," says the psychiatrist James Barrett Jr., his oldest friend. "I don't think he has many confidants. I would call George someone who has a problem with intimacy."

Nowhere has Vaillant been more powerful and articulate than in describing the importance of intimacy and love. And nowhere has he struggled more deeply in his life. He had four children with his first wife, whom he divorced in 1970 after 15 years of marriage. He quickly got married again, to a young woman he had met while speaking in Australia. She came to the United States to help raise Vaillant's children, including an autistic son. She and Vaillant also had a child of their own. During this time, his daughter Anne says, "he was jet-setting around the world and she was holding down the roof at home."

But in the early 1990s, Vaillant left his second wife for a colleague at the study. After five tumultuous years, he and his third wife split, and he returned ("with his tail between his legs," his brother says) to his second wife.

This protracted drama stirred up resentments on all sides—in the women involved, for obvious reasons, but among Vaillant's children, too. "There was a civil war in the family," Anne Vaillant says, "and everyone suffered." And although she says there has been some "détente," four of Vaillant's five children have gone long periods without speaking to him. Vaillant himself describes his family as akin to King Lear's, and himself as "a disconnected, narcissistic father." It

EMBRACE

The great flowery dress of my seventh-grade teacher,
cotton or rayon, pillowcase for her vast
mothering bosom, scented with the perfume
of the unmarried, stretched over hips
that made arms of the lap I sat on—
you were the handkerchief of my remorse
just once, you with your bright roses and tulips,
spidery paths of vines and fluted leaves,
all the smothering penance that nearly consoled me,
until above my sobs I heard hers,
and in her arms the crushing force
or the grateful fury of our unburdening
made that embrace a thing apart:
O heartsick woman! O bewildered boy!

—Michael Collier

Michael Collier's most recent collection is Dark Wild Realm (2006). He teaches at the University of Maryland and directs the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.

struck me that the kingdom has more than an ordinary share of woes.

Vaillant's own work provides an uncanny description of his strengths and struggles. "On the bright side," he has written, "reaction formation allows us to care for someone else when we wish to be cared for ourselves." But in intimate relationships, he continued, the defense "rarely leads to happiness for either party."

Yet Vaillant seems largely unaware of the way his defenses apply to his own case—even though he *is* aware of being unaware; he regularly told me that he would not be a good source of information about his own life, because of distortion. The Harvard data illustrate this phenomenon well. In 1946, for example, 34 percent of the Grant Study men who had served in World War II reported having come under enemy fire, and 25 percent said they had killed an enemy. In 1988, the first number climbed to 40 percent—and the second fell to about 14 percent. "As is well known," Vaillant concluded, "with the passage of years, old wars become more adventurous and less dangerous."

Distortions can clearly serve a protective function. In a test involving a set of pictures, older people tend to remember fewer distressing images (like snakes) and more pleasant ones (like Ferris wheels) than younger people. By giving a profound shape to aging, this tendency can make for a softer, rounder old age, but also a deluded one. One brilliant woman from the Stanford Terman study had been pre-med in college; when she was 30, a vocational survey identified medicine as the field most suitable for her. But her ambitions were squashed by gender bias and the Great Depression, and she ended up a housewife. How, the study staff asked her at age 78, had she managed the gap between her potential and her achievement? "I never knew I had any potential," she answered. Had she ever thought of being a doctor? Never, she said.

At age 50, one Grant Study man declared, "God is dead and man is very much alive and has a wonderful future." He had stopped going to church, he said, when he arrived at Harvard. But as a sophomore, he had reported going to mass four times a week. When Vaillant sent this—and several similar vignettes—to the man for his approval to publish them, the man wrote back, "George, you must have sent these to the wrong person." Vaillant writes, "He could not believe that his college persona could have ever been him. Maturation makes liars of us all."

When we discussed his marriages, Vaillant asked me to report simply that he had been married to his present wife for 40 years, which struck me not as a calculated deception but as a deeply worn habit of thought. Indeed, a few years ago, Anne told me, her father was looking over pictures of her wedding, and came across a picture of his third wife. He stood there puzzled for a time, and then finally asked Anne: "Who is that woman?" "I began to worry that he'd begun to have Alzheimer's," Anne says. "But I actually don't think it's an organic thing. I think it's self-protection." This is what

Vaillant calls "repression," and he's been using it for a long time. "When I was younger, he would forget everything," Anne says. "It was almost like he had his brain erased."

VAILLANT HAS PASSED along day-to-day management of the study to his colleague Robert Waldinger, a researcher and a psychoanalyst. As has always been necessary, Waldinger has kept this 72-year-old ship in the water by paying homage to the dominant model of health. Today, that means taking MRIs of the Grant and Glueck men, collecting DNA swabs—and asking for volunteers to donate their brains to the study. (Meanwhile, recent efficacy studies have restored some luster to psychoanalytic ideas, so the project still encompasses a range of approaches.)

Though Vaillant spends half the year in Australia, his wife's native land, he is still deeply involved in the study, retains his title as co-director, and operates out of the study's office when he's in Boston. He also works the phones to keep track of the men's lives—and their deaths. "I'm trying to reach [name deleted]," I overheard him say one day on the phone from the study's office. He spoke loudly; I gathered the call was overseas. "Oh. I see," he said after a pause. "Do you know of what cause?"

Recently, I asked Vaillant what happened when the men died. "I just got an e-mail this morning from one of the men's sons," he said, "that his father died this January. He would have been 89." I asked him how it felt. He paused, and then said, "The answer to your question is not a pretty one—which is that when someone dies, I finally know what happened to them. And they go in a tidy place in the computer, and they are properly stuffed, and I've done my duty by them. Every now and then, there's a sense of grief, and the sense of losing someone, but it's usually pretty clinical. I'm usually callous with regard to death, from my father dying suddenly and unexpectedly." He added, "I'm not a model of adult development."

Vaillant's confession reminded me of a poignant lesson from his work—that seeing a defense is easier than changing it. Only with patience and tenderness might a person surrender his barbed armor for a softer shield. Perhaps in this, I thought, lies the key to the good life—not rules to follow, nor problems to avoid, but an engaged humility, an earnest acceptance of life's pains and promises. In his efforts to manifest this spirit, George Vaillant is, if not a model, then certainly a practiced guide. For all his love of science and its conclusions, he returns to stories and their questions. When I asked him if there was a death that had affected him, he mentioned Case No. 47—"Alan Poe"—an inspiring, tragic man, who left many lessons and many mysteries, who earnestly sought to "squeeze that lemon." ■

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STEVE JOBS, APPLE'S AILING CEO, is scheduled to return to work this month after a six-month leave, but investors are feeling skittish. Every time he sneezes, shares of Apple catch a cold. Can a CEO—even one as talented and visionary as Jobs—really make or break a corporation? Many business scholars have grown skeptical of the idea of chief executive as superhero. Cutting-edge research reveals that while some CEOs clearly do make a big difference, many are merely the most visible cogs in complex machines.

DO CEOs MATTER?

By Harris Collingwood

SPARE A THOUGHT, if you would, for the trials of the Apple shareholder. Like fretful parents at the bedside of an ailing child, investors have been wringing their hands over the health of Steve Jobs for nearly a year now—or even longer. The Apple Inc. CEO underwent surgery for a rare, treatable form of pancreatic cancer in 2004, and since then, the state of Jobs's health has nagged at shareholders, analysts, and cultists. To some observers, Jobs's fate and Apple's seem entangled beyond all untangling; last year, one analyst estimated that Apple would instantly lose a quarter of its market value were Jobs to leave, whether under his own steam or carried out on his shield. Jobs's doctors might as well append a chart of the company's stock price to his medical file, so closely do its spikes and dips track the chatter about his condition.

Chronic investor anxiety over the Apple CEO turned acute last June, when an emaciated Jobs publicly addressed Apple's software developers. His appearance fanned worries that his cancer had returned. Unimpressed by the company's assertion that Jobs was merely suffering from "a common bug," investors rushed to sell their shares, knocking more than \$4 off Apple's stock price in a day. About six weeks later, *The New York Times*, citing anonymous sources close to Jobs, reported that he had informed Apple's board of directors that he was cancer-free and had undergone an unspecified surgical procedure to address his weight loss. Apple shares

popped 2.6 percent on the news. But relief turned to alarm again in August, when some hapless soul at Bloomberg.com accidentally posted a canned obituary of Jobs, sending traders into a tizzy until Bloomberg put out a somewhat cryptic retraction of its "incomplete" story.

The ghouls and hustlers at play on the Web have been quick to exploit the interplay between Apple's stock price and its CEO's health. In October, one of CNN.com's volunteer "iReporters"—the network is experimenting with so-called citizen journalism—filed an entirely false report that Jobs had been rushed to a hospital after a massive heart attack. Traders suspected that this was a ruse by the iReporter to profit from a fall in Apple's stock price, though a subsequent investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission concluded it was just a teen prank. In any case, Apple shares tumbled 5.4 percent before CNN corrected the report.

For sheer nastiness, though, it's hard to top the hackers who broke into the official Web feed of the annual Macworld developer conference in January. They interrupted the real-time play-by-play of the proceedings with the all-caps message STEVE JOBS JUST DIED. The real bloggers quickly disavowed the message, only to be overridden three minutes later by the hackers: "Oh, wait, sorry. Steve did die. Our condolences." Shortly thereafter the conference organizers pulled down the live feed.

Apple's close-to-the-vest PR policy has opened ample space for rumors to grow. Jobs's instinct for concealment



has spread throughout the company; reporters' inquiries into almost any corporate matter are routinely rebuffed. And even when Apple does make an official comment about Jobs's health, it manages to undermine its own credibility. In light of subsequent revelations, the company's brush-off remark that Jobs was suffering from a "common bug" at the June 2008 conference seems disingenuous at best.

Still, that statement wasn't as damaging to Apple's credibility as the January announcement that Jobs was suffering from a "hormone imbalance" that compromised his ability to absorb protein. The remedy, Jobs said soothingly in a letter released by the company, was "relatively simple and straightforward." The press release sparked another relief rally in Apple shares, but the good feelings ended abruptly nine days later, when Apple released another statement from Jobs admitting that his health problems were "more complex" than initially believed and that he would take a six-month leave from the company to address them.

You know what comes next. Apple shares fell almost \$5 as soon as trading opened the following day—wiping out about \$4 billion of the company's market value—although the stock retook some of the lost ground before day's end. After that whiplash experience, Apple investors could be forgiven for wondering which was less believable, the rumors or Apple's announcements.

As of this writing, Apple maintains that Jobs will be back on the job in June, though many observers are skeptical.

Apple's stock price, meanwhile, has bounced back smartly from its January low, suggesting, perhaps, that investors are coming to terms with the idea of their favorite CEO's mortality.

However the matter of Jobs's return is settled, it prompts other, larger questions: Short-term stock swings aside, should it really matter to Apple whether Jobs returns? How much difference can a CEO make, anyway?

THE ANSWER DOESN'T seem as obvious today as it did a few years ago, before corporate scandals and worldwide financial catastrophe shook the cult of the heroic CEO to its foundations. That cult had grown steadily for more than a quarter century, beginning in 1979, when Lee Iacocca rode in to lead Chrysler—then in the midst of its first federal bailout—into a short-lived revival. A handful of corporate CEOs, including General Electric's Jack Welch, Microsoft's Bill Gates, and Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffett, later became full-fledged celebrities, lionized for single-handedly lifting their companies to stock-market superstardom—the companies' share prices prima facie evidence that the CEOs were worth all that a grateful board of directors could award them. According to this school of thought, when Charles de Gaulle said "The graveyards are full of indispensable men," he was just being a typically contrary Frenchman.

For believers in the CEO's supreme importance, even the presence of ruffians and scoundrels in the CEO ranks

underscored the chief executive's outsize influence. CEOs could make great companies, and CEOs could break them. Dennis Kozlowski's fall from grace and into prison for looting Tyco International was inextricable from the company's disintegration. Enron's collapse was the inevitable consequence of Jeffrey Skilling's criminality. And before the autocratic Maurice "Hank" Greenberg left AIG under a legal cloud in 2005, he'd steered AIG into the credit-default-swaps business, precipitating the company's eventual descent into speculative madness and the global economy's unraveling. *Après moi, le déluge*, indeed.

This is Carlyle's Great Man theory of history, painted on a corporate canvas; and even amid the economic ruins through which we now wander, it still has its zealous adherents, not least among CEOs themselves. Former Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain reportedly believed that his contributions merited a \$40 million bonus, even after spiraling losses forced the venerable brokerage house into the arms of Bank of America. (Bank of America thought otherwise; Thain took no bonus for 2008, and was sent packing in January.)

An exalted view of the boss is supported by a cottage industry of management gurus and executive-compensation consultants. They have good reason to sell boards of directors, investors, journalists, and CEOs themselves on the notion that the chief executive is inordinately valuable. Management gurus win new assignments through referrals from grateful clients, and they can expect no thanks for telling the CEO he's just another cog in the machine. Compensation consultants know that if they win big pay packages for their CEO clients, they'll be rewarded with lucrative contracts to administer employee-benefits plans and the like.

Yet those who have worked for superstar CEOs are not necessarily in agreement with the close identification, in the popular mind, between the CEO and his company. In a May 2006 article for *Stanford Business Magazine*, the management professors Robert Sutton and Jeffrey Pfeffer recount a conversation with Spencer Clark, a high-ranking General Electric executive during the Welch years. "Jack did a good job," Clark said, "but everyone seems to forget that the company had been around for over 100 years before he ever took the job, and he had 70,000 other people to help him."

Many academics share Clark's skepticism. The question of the indispensability of the CEO is one that has occupied business scholars for 70 years. And while the debate is far from settled, many of the most prominent and widely cited business-school professors and other experts believe that the American obsession with who sits at the top of the organizational chart has gone much too far.

THE DEBATE OVER the centrality of the CEO began in earnest in the 1930s, with the work of Chester Barnard, a onetime president of New Jersey Bell. Barnard was one of the first scholars to recognize that the corporation was, first and foremost, a social organization, and that social

phenomena such as groupthink and the development of rival factions influenced a corporation's actions at least as much as coldly rational analysis and deliberation. According to Barnard, the chief executive was peerless as a social force within the organization; only the CEO could infuse working life with the values and aspirations that spurred people to do more than merely make a living.

Barnard's preoccupation with the CEO's meaning-making power issued from the same anxieties that run through the work of the historian Henry Adams and of the pioneering social theorist Max Weber. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, and the power of the church and other established institutions waned, Weber worried in books like *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that newer institutions, especially large business corporations, were

incapable of imbuing people with a sense of purpose. Adams gloomily wondered, in *The Education of Henry Adams*, whether his classical knowledge had any value in a new century dominated by science and commerce. Both wondered how modern workers, in service to mammon, could summon the same passion that earlier generations had called upon to build Europe's great palaces and cathedrals. They feared that the human spirit would shrivel in the face of the coldly rational, impersonal demands of capitalism, and foresaw a future of ever-increasing anomie and social atomization.

Barnard was relatively optimistic, though, that the corporation could supplant religion as a repository of purpose and meaning. In fact, he thought that corporate survival depended on the CEO's ability to make work meaningful. "Even in purely commercial organizations," he wrote in his classic work, *The Functions of the Executive*, "material incentives are so weak as to be almost negligible except when reinforced by other incentives." Without inspirational CEOs, companies would ultimately lose sight of their higher calling and drift into failure.

Since Barnard's days, it has become conventional to think that a corporation, for better or worse, takes on the coloration of its CEO—Jack Welch turns GE into a tribe of aggressive, rigorously unsentimental alpha dogs; Jeff Skilling populates Enron with nihilists expert in gaming the system. One of Barnard's principal intellectual heirs is the management theorist Jim Collins. In the 2001 best seller *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't*, Collins singled out 11 CEOs who were vital, he said, to the enduring success of their organizations. What they had in common was "extreme humility." Rather than throwing their weight around in the corporate hallways, barking orders, and crushing all in their path, Collins said, they quietly subordinated their personalities to the corporation, inspiring the rest of the company by the power of their example.

But how strong is this power—or any executive power? In their groundbreaking "Leadership and Organizational Performance: A Study of Large Corporations," first published in 1972 in *American Sociological Review*, Stanley Lieberman

"Not only could anyone have run GE in the 1990s, [a] dog could have run GE," said Jack Welch's successor, Jeffrey Immelt. "A German shepherd could have run GE."

and James O'Connor argued that it's weak indeed. Perhaps reflecting the anti-authoritarian spirit of the times, the authors asserted that the CEO's influence was seldom decisive in a company's performance. They had the numbers to back up this view. Working with a database of 167 companies, they teased out the effects that various factors had on corporate profitability, from the competitive state of the industry to the size and structure of an individual company to the CEO's managerial decisions. "Industry effects," such as the amount of available capital and the stability of the market, accounted for almost 30 percent of the variance in corporate profits. "Company effects," such as the firm's historical place in the corporate pecking order, explained about 23 percent. "CEO effects" explained just 14.5 percent. And even this impact should be viewed skeptically: it unavoidably bundles CEO actions that were genuinely smart and skillful with those that were merely lucky.

Other scholars have attempted to replicate and extend Lieberman and O'Connor's findings, and many have likewise concluded that external forces influence corporate performance far more than CEOs do. Indeed, more-recent studies have tended to find a smaller CEO effect than Lieberman and O'Connor did—ranging from 4.5 percent to 12.8 percent of profit variance. (The scholar Alison Mackey, at Ohio State University, is a prominent dissenter. In a recent paper, she criticizes the number-crunching methods of Lieberman and O'Connor and, using a different methodology, concludes that CEOs have a dominant influence on performance that may well justify their high pay.)

James March, a management professor at Stanford, goes so far as to say that in any well-run company that's conscientious about grooming its managers, candidates for the top job are so similar in their education, skills, and psychology as to be virtually interchangeable. All that matters is that *someone* be in charge. "Management may be extremely difficult and important even though managers are indistinguishable," he writes. "It is hard to tell the difference between two different light bulbs also; but if you take all the light bulbs away, it is difficult to read in the dark."

This view has won support from some people who might be expected to see executive power in more expansive terms. Earlier this year, Jeffrey Immelt, the beleaguered successor to Jack Welch as CEO of General Electric, rather defensively told a gathering sponsored by the *Financial Times* that in the 1990s, "anyone could have run GE and done well." Warming to his theme, he added, "Not only could anyone have run GE in the 1990s, [a] dog could have run GE. A German shepherd could have run GE." Welch, to his credit, more or less agreed with this assessment. "It was an easier time to be a CEO in the 1990s," he told the *FT*. "The wind was on our backs." As they say on Wall Street, never confuse brains with a bull market.

ONE PROBLEM WITH the idea of the transformative CEO, able to reshape corporate culture or inspire workers to new heights, some scholars argue, is that people simply don't feel allegiance to large entities like corporations, no matter who's at the helm. Their loyalties are far more localized. Like infantrymen, their sense of belonging extends to their own platoon but no farther. And in these

postmodern times, employees are mostly scornful of any grandiose rhetoric about higher purposes and the nobility of their cause. From this perspective, the CEO's power to affect performance, while strong within the immediate team of top executives, rapidly diminishes as it extends beyond that team.

J. Richard Hackman, a psychologist at Harvard, has done extensive work on leadership within small teams, and he has found that leaders do exert measurable influence on their team's success or failure. In his 2002 book, *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances*, he argues that small groups perform best when they operate collaboratively, and not merely as drones subordinated to a leader. The team leader's job is to establish the conditions that enable team members to collaborate competently; the leader needs to spell out exactly where teams should end up, but not dictate the step-by-step process of getting there. Leaders who act boldly and intelligently can make significant differences in teams' effectiveness—but no matter how the leaders act, teams become less effective as they grow in size. Ideal team size, Hackman says, is about six people; performance problems increase exponentially as team size increases beyond that, and the impact of leadership becomes quickly diffused.

The highly localized nature of loyalty, some scholars argue, means that the real power to influence corporate performance resides not with the CEO but with middle management. In the recently published *The Truth About Middle Managers*, Paul Osterman, a professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management, contends that middle managers are neither "victims," robbed of the ability to act independently by some faceless bureaucracy, nor "villains" like *Dilbert's* Bozo-haired boss, too clueless to do anything but gum up the works. In Osterman's view, the middle manager is the secret hero in the large corporation's rise to social and economic dominance. That rise "depended on middle managers," he says, "because you just couldn't achieve the scale that we have without people doing the kind of planning work that they do." As "craft workers," middle managers value their task, sense its importance to the larger cause, and feel great loyalty to the people they work with. But their loyalty to the corporation is fraying, largely because they see top management hogging all the rewards and glory. "There's more cynicism" in the middle-management ranks now, Osterman says. "There's less willingness to go the extra mile."

PERHAPS TO ASK whether the CEO really matters is to ask the wrong question. Three Harvard professors—Noam Wasserman, Bharat Anand, and Nitin Nohria—say in a recent paper that the right question is, *When* does leadership matter? Using advanced statistical techniques that go by a wonderfully *CSI*-style name, "variance decomposition analysis," the authors examine 531 companies in 42 industries and isolate leadership effects from other determinants of corporate performance. They conclude that leadership matters *sometimes*. It doesn't make much difference at electrical-utility companies, which are so constrained by government regulations and the cost of fuel that there's very little room for the CEO to exercise any discretion. The professors used the term "Titular Figureheads" for such CEOs. In addition to

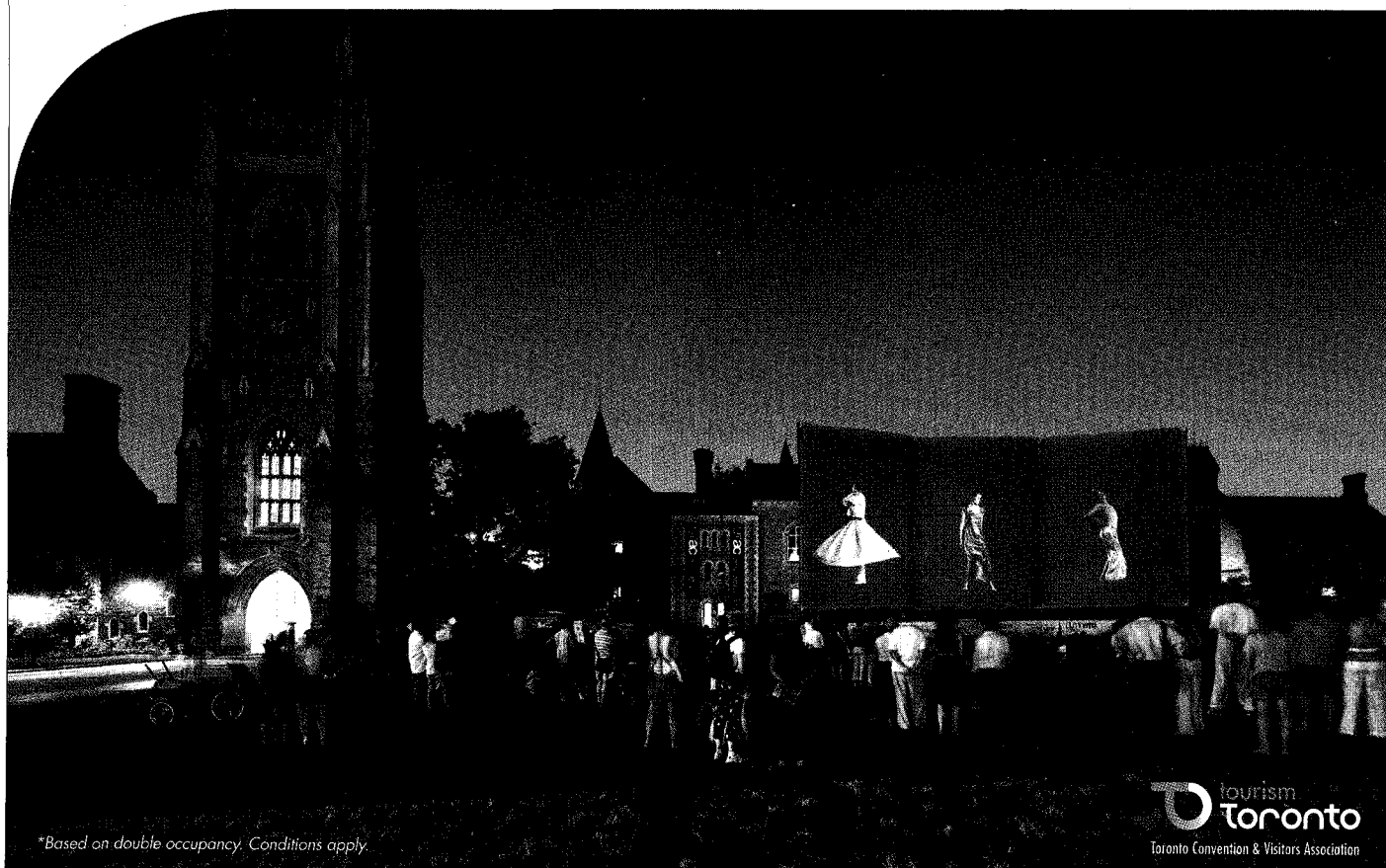


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Scott Shepley in Catalyst Theatre's *Nevermore*
Photo by Sean McLennan

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utilities, you'll find them in stable, old-line industries—paper mills, meat wholesalers—where the pace of change is slow.

At the other end of the spectrum, CEOs in some industries have a great deal of discretion. They're known as "Unconstrained Managers." In a company such as Research in Motion, Motorola, or, for that matter, Apple, the CEO is the one who decides which new cell phone to release to a waiting public, which chip company will supply the integrated circuits that make it work, and which phone-service providers to partner with. Those decisions can matter a great deal, as might be suggested by the diverging fortunes of Research in Motion, whose newest BlackBerrys are flying off the shelves, and Motorola, whose last hit phone was the Razr, introduced in 2004—a lifetime ago in that industry, where product cycles are measured in months.

In hotly competitive industries where new-product development is crucial and choices about which markets to focus upon are difficult—industries like communications equipment,

computers, or aircraft—an Unconstrained Manager can have a big impact. Investors worry about Steve Jobs's health because they believe Apple needs his flair for making inspired choices. When Jobs returned to Apple in 1997, after being ousted in a 1985 boardroom revolt, he made the decision to throw the company's resources into the iMac, which had been languishing in the product-development lab, and the candy-colored, Internet-friendly machine reversed Apple's declining fortunes. He scored an even bigger coup when he decided that Apple's next signature product would be an MP3 player. Although the iPod was a late entrant in a crowded market, the elegant little machine took the world by storm.

Not every Unconstrained Manager is a Steve Jobs, of course. "It is worth reinforcing here," Wasserman, Anand, and Nohria write, "that a large CEO effect need not imply a positive impact." In fact, the CEO effect is sharply negative at least as often as it is positive. Donald Hambrick and Sydney Finkelstein, who coined the Titular Figurehead/Unconstrained Manager dichotomy in a 1987 article in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, even suggest that the world would be better off if leadership effects were always negligible. "If we had to choose as a society between doing away with Figureheads or Unconstrained Managers," they wrote, "clearly it is the Figureheads we would keep."

They might have been thinking of what happened to Beatrice Companies when two Unconstrained Managers, first Wallace Rasmussen and then James Dutt, took over as CEOs in the late '70s, after a succession of Figureheads. As recounted in an absorbing study—no, really—by the Harvard professor George Baker in *The Journal of Finance*, their predecessors had followed a well-thumbed playbook to build Beatrice from a small Nebraska creamery into a money-spinning conglomerate that sold everything from Meadow Gold dairy products to Samsonite luggage. Most of its acquisitions were profitable, family-owned companies in need of additional capital. They were well-run, but their managers lacked polish and up-to-date technical skills. Beatrice supplied capital and intensive management training, but otherwise left them intact.

Rasmussen and Dutt changed all that. Instead of pursuing family-owned firms, they plunged into costly bidding wars for big public corporations. Dutt in particular centralized decision-making at Beatrice's Chicago headquarters, forcing units that had operated independently into six large divisions. Profits shrank, shareholders dumped their stock, and rumors began to swirl that Beatrice would fall to a corporate raider. After five of the company's top managers threatened to resign en masse if Dutt stayed on, the CEO was out. Leveraged-buyout titan KKR bought the company and broke it up. It took two CEOs nine years to wreck what 85 years of patient accumulation had built.

Maybe that's the ultimate lesson here: CEOs can matter, but we all might be better off if they didn't. "Good leaders can make a small positive difference; bad leaders can make a huge negative difference," Stanford's Jeffrey Pfeffer told *Fortune* in 2006. Many Americans, surveying the aftermath of eight years with an Unconstrained Manager as their chief executive, might be tempted to agree. ■

Harris Collingwood is a writer in New York.

RIDDLE

Puffed like an adder.
Deflated like a balloon.
Tiny or huge, you are
never the right size.

A little man or woman,
you strut, you speak,
you want. You
have delusions.

O little one,
look at yourself,
posturing and ridiculous.
Go now, please GO.

But no, without you,
what would I be?
That is the question
I cannot answer

until I am changed into
particle or star, and you,
you drift away as if you
had never been there at all.

—Elizabeth Spires

Elizabeth Spires's recent books are *I Heard God Talking to Me: William Edmondson and His Stone Carvings* (2009) and *The Wave-Maker* (2008). She teaches at Goucher College.

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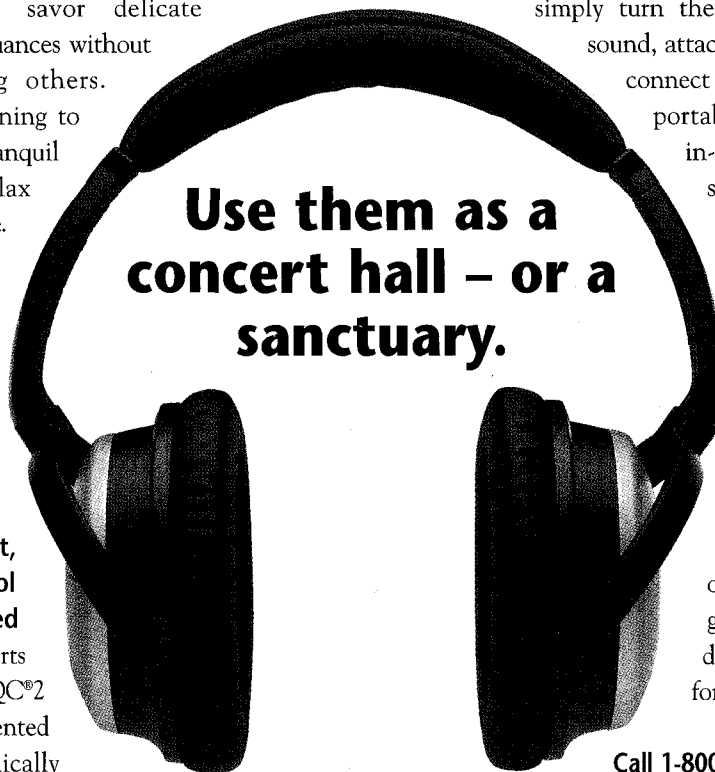
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MAP

The Life Aquatic

The 21 swimming pools aboard ship include a kids' water park, a beach pool, and two wave pools. More than 600,000 gallons of water will circulate in the various pools; passengers will likely consume another 560,000 gallons per day.

Greenways

Amidships, gardeners will manicure a green space half the size of a football field, filled with tropical plants, vine-covered trellises, and 20-foot trees. Flanked by balconies fronting hundreds of cabins, the park might make people wonder whether they're really at sea. The space is called Central Park.

Water Follies

Forty resident thespians and water ballerinas will appear in nightly shows at two theaters. One troupe will stage Broadway-style productions in a 1,380-seat playhouse. The other will perform spectacles at the outdoor AquaTheater, which is the ship's star attraction: wrapped in its own wind-shielded microclimate, it features 1,972 nozzles that spray water in concert with spotlights.

Hope Floats

AS THE RECESSION BLOWS A GALE, THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE CRUISE SHIP NEARS COMPLETION.

By Rory Nugent

Graphics by Bryan Christie

IN NOVEMBER, ROYAL Caribbean will take delivery of a true sea monster. Now in its final phase of construction, the *Oasis of the Seas* will be the biggest (longest, tallest, widest, heaviest) passenger ship ever built—and the most expensive. It will dwarf Nimitz-class aircraft carriers and cast shadows dockside atop 20-story buildings. A crew of 2,165 will tend the expectations of up to 6,296 passengers.

In profile, the *Oasis* appears as flat and businesslike as a floating Hyatt, a

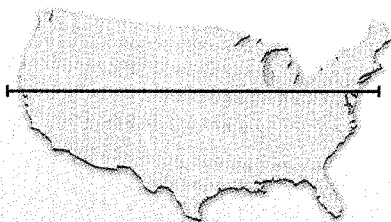
triumph of the straightedge over the curves, fluting, and flair of yesteryear's ocean liners. The interior space, though, is a celebration of excess: a legion of designers has packed the ship with glitzy amenities and attractions of the sort usually associated with Las Vegas (albeit sanitized—the dark edge is staked out by a wash-off-tattoo parlor).

Cruise ships take years to build; the *Oasis* was ordered—for \$1.4 billion—in 2006, near the height of the boom. Royal Caribbean will be forced to take delivery of another, similarly sized

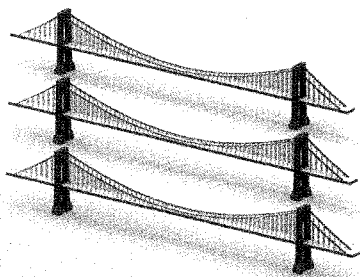
ship next year. The company's net debt may reach \$9.3 billion by the end of 2010—that's according to Goldman Sachs, which has a sell recommendation on Royal Caribbean, and little enthusiasm for the cruise industry as a whole. Perhaps the *Oasis* will be a ringing success, proving market mavens wrong yet again. But it may leave the dock already a dinosaur—a floating emblem of a bankrupt era. **A**

Rory Nugent is the author, most recently, of *Down at the Docks*.

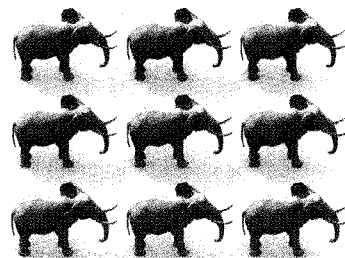
3,300 miles of electrical cables
enough to stretch across the country



158,503 gallons of paint
enough to paint the George Washington
Bridge three times over



**110,230 pounds of
ice cubes made per day**
more than the weight of
nine adult male elephants



The Grid

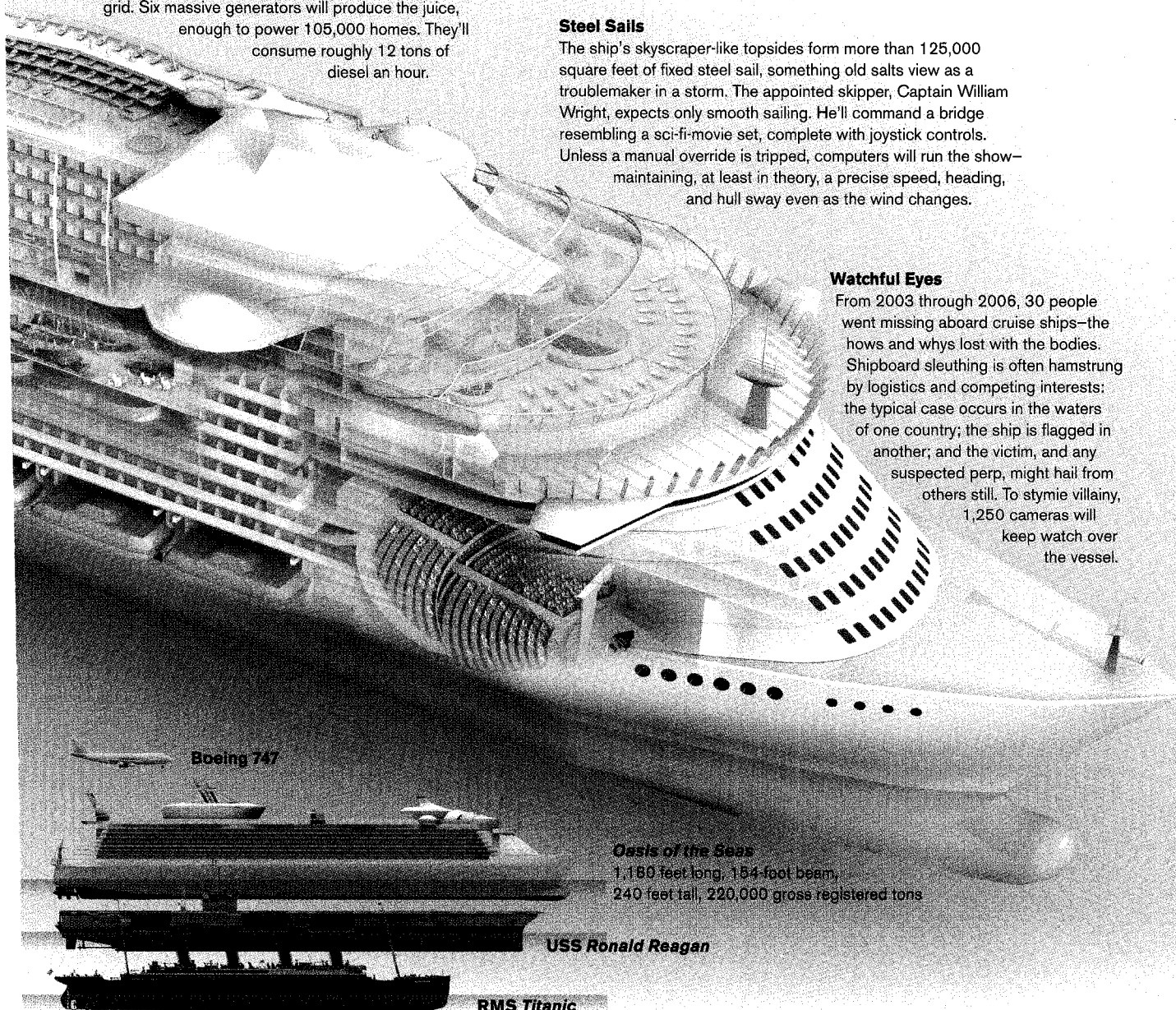
A floating municipality of 8,000 souls, the ship will be its own utility company. Everything from engines to ice-cube makers will plug into a 100-megawatt electrical grid. Six massive generators will produce the juice, enough to power 105,000 homes. They'll consume roughly 12 tons of diesel an hour.

Steel Sails

The ship's skyscraper-like topsides form more than 125,000 square feet of fixed steel sail, something old salts view as a troublemaker in a storm. The appointed skipper, Captain William Wright, expects only smooth sailing. He'll command a bridge resembling a sci-fi-movie set, complete with joystick controls. Unless a manual override is tripped, computers will run the show—maintaining, at least in theory, a precise speed, heading, and hull sway even as the wind changes.

Watchful Eyes

From 2003 through 2006, 30 people went missing aboard cruise ships—the hows and whys lost with the bodies. Shipboard sleuthing is often hamstrung by logistics and competing interests: the typical case occurs in the waters of one country; the ship is flagged in another; and the victim, and any suspected perp, might hail from others still. To stymie villainy, 1,250 cameras will keep watch over the vessel.



Boeing 747

Oasis of the Seas

1,180 feet long, 154-foot beam,
240 feet tall, 220,000 gross registered tons

USS Ronald Reagan

RMS Titanic

DURING THE FASHION boom that began in the 1980s, the relationship between fashion and its customers was the same as the one between art and its rich, often unlovely patrons: all that money sloshing around led to excessive consumption, but it also created a fertile soil in which works of beauty and integrity could develop. Last year that boom ended with breathtaking rapidity and finality. Luckily, a contingent of people at the heart of American fashion has for years been readying for post-crash style.

FASHION IN DARK TIMES

By Benjamin Schwarz

IT WAS A splendid relic, this February's New York Fashion Week. Twice a year, in February and September, some 250 designers introduce their collections for the upcoming season. Most of the superstars stage runway shows beneath improbably glamorous temporary tents in Bryant Park, while the Next New Things and the famously edgy hold presentations in galleries and formerly grotty lofts in Chelsea and the Meatpacking District. To the natives, it's a semiannual rite to be endured: a constant stream of town cars and cabs cleaves the middle third of Manhattan, relaying



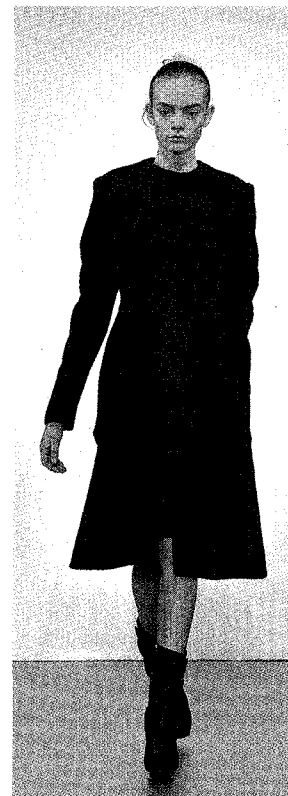
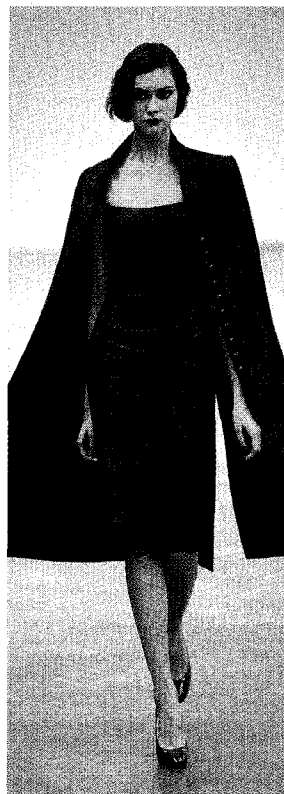
the fashion world's A-listers steadily breeze past them to the head of the queue).

The point of it all is hardly obvious. Decades ago, these presentations were hushed, semisecret affairs for a very limited audience made up of a designer's select group of private clients (the ladies who lunched at the Colony and Le Pavillon); buyers from Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman, Peck & Peck, and, probably at the top of the heap, Saks Fifth Avenue, who would place orders for the dresses they would sell to their ever so slightly less select clients; and the elite of the fashion press (actually, fashion being then so rarefied, there was hardly a *non-elite* fashion press)—the blue-rinsed Carmel Snow of *Harper's Bazaar* and the equally blue-rinsed Edna Woolman Chase of *Vogue*, along with their minions, "tall, cool Vassar graduates," as S. J. Perelman described them, all in their pillbox hats and white gloves. Fearing piracy of their upcoming designs, the handful of American fashion houses shunned publicity and prohibited even sketching.

Although small-scale and discreet, those old-fashioned shows clearly served a mercantile purpose. Fashion Week, on the other hand, was invented in the 1990s, at the height of New York's giddy, gilded age, as a pseudo-event to generate froth, a quality that may be priceless—or worthless. And all of the collections are now photographed and, in quite a few cases, filmed, so they're available, sometimes within minutes, on dozens of Web sites (most prominently, Style.com), where they can be studied in detail. In this environment, sketching is unnecessary, and fashion-besotted kids in Kankakee get a closer view of the sculptural seaming on Narciso Rodriguez's rigorously tailored, cropped khaki wool-twill jacket than do Suzy Menkes and Claire Danes in the front row. Which makes those blingy, *Sex and the City*-ish tent shows rather quaint. "Kind of like a Shriners' convention—people get together and wear funny outfits," the gimlet-eyed fashion critic Lynn Yaeger observed while filing into an unusually celebrity-engorged show.

The Colony closed in 1971, Le Pavillon in 1972, Peck & Peck in 1974, and Bonwit Teller in 1990; Saks, as we'll see, is another story. And though an elegiac mood suffused February's Fashion Week, few there cared a whit for the long-vanished world of fashion doyennes. Indeed, if today's standard-issue fashionistas have thought at all about that former era, it has only been to congratulate themselves on how much more "free," diverse, and glittery is their own new nexus of money, prestige, and fashion—an agglomeration of the wives, girlfriends, and aimless daughters of Manhattan's entertainment, media, and financial titans and mini-titans that forms the gelatin in which are suspended the candied fruit of Ivy-educated actresses, charismatic DJs, scenesters with great bone structure, and rap stars given to obscene gestures on the most unlikely occasions.

During this gray February week the nostalgia was, of course, for the gaudiest spree in New York's history—a binge that began sometime in the Reagan years, accelerated



*Elegant and adult:
Clothes by L'Wren Scott
(above) and Francisco Costa,
for Calvin Klein (right)*

for two decades (despite brief and minor slowdowns at the end of 1987 and 2001, and what in retrospect was a trifling breather in 1990–91), and ended last year with breathtaking rapidity and finality. With one eye on the Dow and the other on the lonely stretches of Bergdorf's main floor, Yaeger marveled, "It's getting worse so fast." Sally Singer, *Vogue's* director of fashion news and features, who has the most sociologically and historically sophisticated antennae in fashion (honed by her fanatical childhood home sewing, her Berkeley-dropout stint as a beautician in Oakland, her graduate work in American studies at Yale, and her quasi-Marxian rigor as an editor at the *London Review of Books*), was noticing a new trend on Manhattan streets: cute young women putting skirts and little lace-up shoes together with the expensive suit jackets and crisp striped shirts their newly unemployed banker boyfriends no longer needed. "Great look," she allowed with a shrug.

Fashion's strange career and the city's boom years entwined. Not only was Fashion Week that era's creature; the period had essentially created that event's very locales. Before the boom, Bryant Park meant methadone addicts, Chelsea meant shabby gentility, and the Meatpacking District meant rough trade, transvestite prostitutes, and, well, meatpacking. By boom's end, all of Manhattan (and

FIRSTVIEW

a good part of Brooklyn, and even some of Queens) had, it seemed, become one vast, hip neighborhood. This meant that soaring rents were eroding the traditional centers of garment manufacturing, but it also meant that talented young designers now had swaths of new territory in which to open their own boutiques and build an ever-growing fashion-conscious customer base.

The main store of Tracy Feith, for instance, one of the bevy of young designers Singer has nurtured and championed (Feith was relatively unknown outside fashion circles until Michelle Obama wore his dress at the National Prayer Service the morning after the Inauguration), moved last September from Mulberry Street, which was transformed in the 1990s from goombahville to a center of insouciant hipness, to Williamsburg—which was transformed in the early 2000s from a pool for poor immigrants to ... a center of insouciant hipness. More generally, the relationship between fashion and the few who populated the boom-engendered scene under the tents, as well as between fashion and the vast army of boom-engendered fashion customers, was the same as the relationship between art and its rich, powerful, often unlovely patrons: all that money sloshing around led to excessive, vulgar creations and consumption, but it also created a fertile soil in which works of beauty and integrity could develop.



Strong lines: Clothes by Matthew Ames



IN 1931 AND 1932, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote two essays, “Echoes of the Jazz Age” and “My Lost City,” in which he described how in just two years New York’s “vaunting pride” and “steady golden roar” born of “fantastic success” and fashionable, youthful free spending came to seem “as far away as the days before the War”—and how the reckless élan that characterized those vanished years had been replaced by a chastened awareness of dashed hopes and circumscribed ambition. Indirectly, Fitzgerald’s pieces remind us that the Depression had insidiously but rather slowly worked its way into the life of New York. The October 1929 crash had been a jolt, but the Christmas shopping season following on its heels was a prosperous one. The market’s precipitous drop seemed, if not a healthy correction, then at least, probably, a manageable one; indeed, Wall Street had recovered a good portion of the losses from the October crash in the mini-rally of early 1930, and the market wouldn’t find its bottom until July 1932. It was really only in the autumn of 1930, perhaps even later, that it became clear to New Yorkers that what Fitzgerald called “the most expensive orgy in history” was irrevocably over.

The current collapse, universally labeled within the fashion world a depression, has struck with a vicious suddenness that can almost be dated to the week. Everything had been different just five months before, in September 2008, at the previous Fashion Week. True, by then everyone knew that some economizing lay ahead, even perhaps, worst-case scenario, something on the order of the 1991 recession. But spending on fashion—on uplift and fantasy—had proved recession-resistant. Saks, for instance, knew its customers and, like most stores of its kind, bet on their desires. At the beginning of 2008 it placed heavy orders on the New York collections and on the collections presented in succession in London, Milan, and Paris over the following months. But in October, in what Stephen Sadove, the CEO of Saks, told *The Wall Street Journal* was “as short a period of time as you can possibly imagine,” fashion customers just stopped buying. By mid-November, Saks had cut its prices by 70 percent—well below the break-even point. This introduced the most economically ravaging period in the history of American fashion. Saks’s competitors were forced to follow suit, which meant that designers got next to nothing for their fall collections. As Tracey Ross, who ran what was probably the best-curated boutique in Los Angeles (she was forced out of business after nearly 20 years, in December), put it, “I am like, ‘Do the math. I sold your \$800 shoes for \$50.’”

New York fashion is mostly a lot of small businesses. Even household-name designers often lack backers, which means that they make twice-yearly gambles (on their fall and spring collections) requiring huge cash outlays—for the most part, fabrics have to be bought, patterns cut, garments sewn, and finishes applied before any money comes in. All of which makes the industry unusually vulnerable to the credit squeeze. Fashion is by far the largest

manufacturing industry in New York, but it's mostly made up of piecework (for instance, Lyn Devon, a rising designer known for her well-cut, sexy renditions of classics, relies on four women in Queens to produce all her knitwear). Last season's sales, then, were "very, very destructive," as Singer says. "It might be cool to be able to find something for 80 percent off ... but that means a lot of people aren't getting paid, and a lot of businesses are going to go under." Diane von Furstenberg, who serves as president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, declared with old-world imperiousness that the sales that had devastated the industry "cannot happen again."

But they're bound to. Days before Fashion Week, a friend in the fashion world ran into the fashion director of a tony Manhattan department store on the store's empty main sales floor. Surveying the unsold spring lines, the director said the clothes would sit at full price on the shelves until March (the conventional understanding, violated by Saks in the fall, holds that stores won't mark down prices for two months), and "then we slash." For their part, of course, the large retailers are also hemorrhaging: in January, Saks fired 1,100 people, including its director of women's fashion, Michael Fink, and Neiman's fired 375 (just after Fashion Week, Neiman's fired an additional 450 employees).

Given this cataclysmic reality, Fashion Week itself was, depending on one's point of view, a remnant of an age of gaudy excess or evidence of remarkable and unfounded pluck. A runway show in one of the tents can cost \$800,000: the 40 or so outfits must be handmade, the space rented (\$50,000), shoes and accessories (usually designed specifically for the collection) bought, and the stylist, lighting designer, hair and makeup artists, and 40-some models (top ones traditionally get \$20,000 a show) paid. So the decision Rodriguez made to finance his own tent show (he lost his backer, Liz Claiborne Inc., in October) was gutsy. True, economizing was evident throughout Fashion Week: the models halved their catwalk fees, and a number of designers scaled back their presentations—Marc Jacobs, for instance, cut his guest list from 2,000 to 500, and decided to forgo his once de rigueur after-party. Still, Fashion Week's purpose is to shimmer, and there were more than enough dos. Their atmosphere did bring to mind Fitzgerald's description of post-crash cocktail parties in the first years of the 1930s:

A last hollow survival of the days of carnival [in which] a few childish wraiths still played to keep up the pretense that they were alive, betraying by their feverish voices and hectic cheeks the thinness of the masquerade.

Fashion, of course, draws far more than its share of such young and foolish creatures, but for every three fashionistas attracted to the glitzy and the trendy of Fashion Week, there was someone more seasoned, enticed by fashion's singular ability to marry aesthetics and psychology, formalism and eroticism. Those people were far more likely to be at certain presentations (say, L'Wren Scott's or Francisco Costa's for Calvin Klein) than at others (Proenza Schouler's, Alexander Wang's), and, being mostly of a certain age and leading very busy lives, would eschew those parties anyway. Hardly recreational shoppers, they'd probably been less

excessive spenders than many well-off, fashion-minded Manhattanites; but their country's prevailing culture—and particularly their city's—had hardly been an ascetic one, and the boom had been long. As is true for most Americans, the period since ... well, since the September Fashion Week has amounted to the great chastening experience of their lives. Outside Rodriguez's show, a woman much photographed by the fashion blogs for her stylish and eccentric dress carried a bag striking for its combination of whimsy and sophistication. The ornamentation, "rather *Alice in Wonderland*-ish," as she put it, seemed handmade. "Well, hand-applied," she explained, "though who really knows where or by whom." The irony turned to self-disgust as she volunteered that she'd bought it for a modest fortune on Labor Day—"just five months ago. It now just seems so obscene." She liked the bag, but she had enough bags.

Those given to introspection at Fashion Week were similarly dismayed, not just with themselves and fashion's readily apparent excesses but with the city's decades-long, dizzying spree—an attitude that echoed Fitzgerald's description of New Yorkers' sobering-up after a similarly immoderate era: "Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth."

TO PUT IT in very different terms, consumers of fashion are undergoing a "values correction," as the retail consultant Candace Corlett told Reuters. If that's so, a contingent of people at the heart of American fashion has for years been readying for post-crash style. The great figures in fashion need a kind of clairvoyance, for they have to show women what they want before they know that they want it. Critics given to a crude commercial determinism have long dismissed that as nothing more than the market dictating to hapless consumers what fripperies to buy. But in fact insight into what women want is born of emotional and psychological sympathy and an exquisite sensitivity to the faintest and most distant cultural and commercial tremors.

Fashion is both a form of self-expression and an outward means of defining and altering selfhood. (Indeed, fashion people largely agree that a woman's sense of style grows out of her youthful vision of the romance of adulthood.) It famously, complicatedly blends art and commerce, and perhaps the highest compliment one can pay a designer is to say that he or she understands the customer: a good part of the art lies in fathoming her mood, her desires, and her ambitions, and the ways these may shift from season to season and year to year and evolve as she ages. The best designers challenge those who wear their clothes—they want to guide and at times even push them, but they'll fail in every sense when they push in a direction the customer repudiates. Underlying the relationship between designer and customer are a handful of fashion editors and store fashion directors who themselves guide, prod, and educate the other parties. They discover and promote emerging talent, and help established designers refine and enlarge their aesthetic and commercial goals.

Two of the most influential of these matchmakers and tastemakers—Singer and Julie Gilhart, the senior vice president and fashion director of Barneys New York, a store that

exercises the greatest sway of any in the country—extracted what substance there was to be had from Fashion Week. Singer, legendary for her work ethic and ferocious energy (and possessed of a near-Talmudic knowledge of the New York subway system), attended upward of 10 presentations a day, shuttling on Saturday, for instance, from Chelsea for the Ohne Titel show (biker/Rick Owens-inspired, lots of chain mail, but also some formfitting dresses and jackets) to far-west Midtown for the VPL show (innerwear as outerwear, dance-girl look), then crosstown to a private presentation by Koi Suwannagate (all cashmere), later to the Roseland ballroom for the show of the Next Huge Thing, Alexander Wang (cropped blazers and body-conscious dresses for what one observer called “the skinny hipster in the city”), and back to Chelsea to a hideously overcrowded loft (the fire marshals seem to look the other way during Fashion Week) for a presentation by the “fashion collective” Threeseasfour, which featured geometric shapes and uncharacteristically sharp tailoring. Avoiding the parties, she capped off the evening at a buffet supper in solid, sleepy Cobble Hill, where the theme was a salute to Oregon and the entertainment was folk ballads performed by the hosts’ children. Gilhart, impatient with the glut, jokingly told *New York* magazine that by Wednesday she was trying to escape Fashion Week. “I started looking for flights: ‘How much would it cost to just fly away to the Dominican Republic? Would Turks and Caicos be cheaper?’” The whole scene “just got excessive.” Though blasé, as she told me, about “runway shows with pretty clothes,” Gilhart (who, when I first met her last summer, was wearing a sundress from Rogan Gregory’s organic, sustainable line for Target, a black-lace Icelandic bracelet, and a gold surfer’s pendant from Abraxas Rex) is surprisingly excited about what she believes the current crash will mean for the future of fashion. She has long maintained that women want—or should want—something different from what they’ve so far been offered by fashion. Now, by necessity, they are going to get it.

Singer and Gilhart have responded with sympathy to what their close friends the designers Ruben and Isabel Toledo call “the fashion plunge” (obviously, many people they love and admire are in financial jeopardy), but they don’t yearn for a return to the fashion spree. Gilhart, who would be meeting with a charitable group in the South Bronx the next weekend, put things in perspective by describing what she sees there: “Now *that’s* a catastrophe.” Fashion, she said, “will have to take some hits,” but the plunge “will lead us to a new era in fashion, and to a better place”—a place she and Singer have been trying to get to for years. “I’m quite optimistic,” Singer told an audience at a “Conscientious Consumption” panel she helped organize at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles immediately after Fashion Week. This economy, Singer said, has made women think, “My God—why did I need all this stuff?” Gilhart adds that thanks to the recession, “the customer is just thinking more,” which “is preparing the ground for a more conscious consumerism.”

These women hope this new deliberation will benefit the savings rate, the environment, the workers of the world,

animals, and—not least—fashion. Gilhart led Barneys’ development of its own line of all-organic casual clothes, made by Loomstate, and has deployed her clout to persuade designers to make clothes from organic, recycled, and discarded materials. She used the store’s powerful publicity machine (buzz-inducing Christmas window displays on the Upper East Side, in Chicago’s Gold Coast, and in Beverly Hills) to push a tough though quirky environmental message on its customers. She has sought out designers and lines committed to high labor standards and economic development. *Vogue’s* “View” section, which Singer oversees, inaugurated a monthly page on Style Ethics in March. It’s a link Singer has been trying to make for years, as she has nudged fashion consumers and producers to rethink their stances toward not just animals and workers but, more generally, the nasty ethos that pervades the fashion world. She told *Paper* in 2000:

I think that there are a considerable number of people in this industry who think that to be cool and hip and to have “edge,” it is essential to be cruel—to be a bitch, for lack of a better word ... I think there’s an idea in the fashion world that if you’re humane and you’re thoughtful ... that you are somehow less hip ... This posturing in the industry simply has to be done away with.

Within both women there’s a tension between delight in fashion—a delight rooted simultaneously in their own refined aesthetic and girlish thrill (“Wearing clothes is fun,” Singer says)—and an acute awareness that, in Singer’s words, “the world does not need more things.” Both have tried to reconcile that tension by urging “a sustainable

frugality.” The trend-driven, recreational shopping of the binge years (Singer terms it the “yo-yo dieting of clothes buying”) enormously damaged fashion, because the development of a sense of style depends on discernment and discrimination—on the idea, long Singer’s mantra, that women should “buy less, but buy better.”

The stylish woman, she asserts, “carefully builds a wardrobe.” Singer bought exactly one dress this season, at Barneys—a cocktail dress by Isabel Toledo (a designer who aims to “make a garment that lasts”: “It’s not just yours. It should be your daughter’s eventually”). Singer’s stylish woman “wears great things from five years ago, 10 years ago.” On the first day of Fashion Week, Singer, whose own style her friend Kim Hastreiter, the editor of *Paper* magazine, calls “windswept chic,” wore a jacket she had bought last year (Italian double-knit wool, from Marco Zanini’s first and last collection for Halston) over a silk-and-cotton V-neck from J. Crew, whose Italian yarns, Singer says, display “obviously great sourcing” and whose sweaters form a staple of Michelle Obama’s sensible-chic, workaday wardrobe. She put it over “an old Dosa shirt,” Dosa being the line designed by her L.A.-based friend Christina Kim, who, years before green was the new black, was making all her clothes to what could be described as fanatically high ethical and environmental standards. Singer’s pants were green velvet, from Vanessa Bruno; her shoes “very old pointy ballet flats,” from Devi Kroell.

The best designers challenge those who wear their clothes—they want to guide and at times even push them.

Obviously, this idea of buying so-called investment pieces resonates more deeply today than it did even six months ago. As Gilhart says, "If I were a consumer now, I'd really want to buy pieces that count, that last; the customer is in no hurry. She should be choosing these things with great care." (In an effort to guide the customer to focus on enduring design rather than the au courant, Gilhart is now working with the designer Stefano Pilati of Yves Saint Laurent, who is assembling a new line for Barneys to revive the best styles from the archives of that renowned French design house.) Part of that care, Singer maintains, means recognizing that "things that are very expensive can be very expensive for just the right reasons—because they were made beautifully by someone who really gave a lot of care to the design and by people who were fairly paid along the way to execute something that was rather difficult. Those prices that often seem high are fair prices."

If the consumer is expected to make conscientious choices based on an item's provenance (favoring, for instance, designers who use wool made from humanely raised sheep—hardly a frivolous concern given the conditions sheep routinely endure), both the retailer and the customer are in for a whole new layer of homework, on top of the Stakhanovite diligence many already apply to their study of such bibles as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, and *Elle*. But even if a woman can figure out what's best for the Earth, she still has the eternal problem of choosing what's stylistically best for *her*.

In this responsible new world, a woman may be happy with the notion of buying one new, expensive-because-it-is-fairly-priced dress per year. But when it comes down to choosing which of those dresses will perennially look good on her, the pressure is intense. What woman hasn't made wardrobe mistakes? How to be sure—even if one scrupulously avoids gauchos and go-go boots—that one's daughter will not judge this year's purchase (when, in the fullness of time, it becomes hers) one of them? The cognoscenti of the fashion universe distinguish between fashion and style. A woman should just find her own personal style, they urge, and then she will always look great. Easy for them to say.

Thanks to American voters, the heralds of a new era in fashion now have an example to point to. It's nearly impossible to overstate the significance Michelle Obama holds for the world of American fashion generally and for these advocates of a newly conscious consumerism specifically. The designers Obama favors aren't the biggest names, nor are they the trendy ones. Rather, they're those whose creations are never tied to a "look" or a "moment." The point is not to copy Obama's style but rather to follow her approach. According to Singer, when Obama wears a dress by Toledo (whose clothes are expensive because they're exquisitely made and because she pays her cutters and sewers very well), women don't necessarily "want to buy a knock-off Toledo. They just see that Obama is a woman with style who buys interesting things—things that are different from what they've seen before—and wears them well, and they're

inspired to do the same." Of course, she's a woman with not just a sense of style but the sense, and the ability, to choose stylish advisers.

DESPITE THE EVER-PRESENT frivolity and the new foreboding, a lot of the clothes that emerged from Fashion Week were unusually strong. Designers were trying to respond to the national mood—one that had darkened intensely just since they'd bought the fabrics last October for the clothes that would not be in the stores until August. True, some designers went defiantly, exuberantly over the top—Marc Jacobs most obviously, with his nostalgic, big-shouldered encomium to the 1980s, when the great splurge had begun. But for most, this wasn't a time to play around. Most of the better lines covered a spectrum: there were the pretty good, snap-to, grown-up, and wearable (Doo-Ri Chung, who "didn't feel bright colors," and Thakoon Panichgul, although in a clumsy effort at luxe he festooned his otherwise smart collection with a lot of fur hats, coats, and jackets); the very good, practical, and authoritative (Donna Karan and Michael Kors, though fur, always a cheap ploy, also vitiated Kors's collection, and shearling did Karan's); and the terrific, elegant, and adult (Francisco Costa for Calvin Klein, L'Wren Scott).

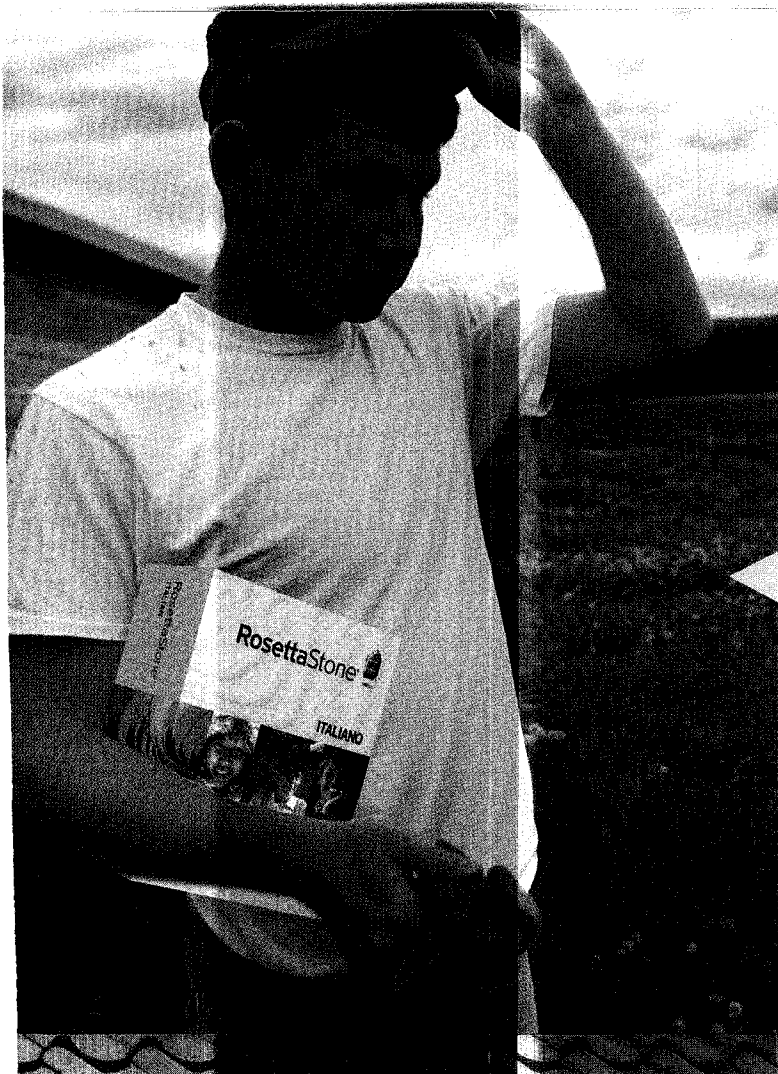
But the best collection to emerge, while entirely in keeping with the mood, wasn't responding to it: that of Matthew Ames, a 28-year-old Brooklyn-based designer who presented in New York for the first time (he'd shown in Paris the three previous years). If Gilhart is right that the economic upheaval will inaugurate a new era in fashion, then Ames is likely to be its first great designer.

Marked by their pure, strong lines, his austere garments—beautiful, not pretty—in what he calls "a classic American palette" of camel, ecru, loden, tobacco, and blue denim, are sophisticated and even avant-garde but unfussy (no buttons, no linings), practical, and marked by an elegant ease and comfort. "I've always wanted to make pieces that are lasting," he said, "not pieces that will only excite people for the moment. People want to buy something that's not going to look old in six months."

Ames's pieces seem at once nearly medieval and from the future. They're not in fashion, and they won't go out of fashion. And they're versatile. For instance, one of his garments—a single piece of silk with one seam, an elastic waistband, and a long extension—can be worn five ways, so it can be worn by women of different ages, or by the same woman as she ages. They're enduring: his attention to the quality of his materials (woolens, denim, cashmere and cashmere-cotton blends, silk crepe) and to detail and craft is extreme. Prices are high but not loony-high: dresses retail for \$800 to \$1,500. A post-crash woman (at least one in the average *Atlantic* reader's income bracket) determined to defend the value of style through these dark times could make worse investments. Her daughter will probably thank her. ■

Benjamin Schwarz is The Atlantic's literary editor and national editor.

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JACOB ZUMA IS A FORMER GOATHERD, a master of traditional Zulu stick-fighting, a resistance hero, a one-time spymaster, a graceful dancer, and the father of some 20 children. He has been tried for rape and indicted for corruption, racketeering, and fraud. He has been called the next Mandela and the next Mugabe, a black Jesus and a crass rube. By the time you read this, he will almost certainly be the new president of South Africa. Here is the story of his sometimes troubling rise—and what it portends for the future of his country.

PROFILE

JACOB'S LADDER

By Douglas Foster

WE WERE ABOUT to finish tea when Jacob Zuma said, “I truthfully never wanted to be president.” It was April 2007—a time when he looked poised to either step up into the office once held by Nelson Mandela or step off the political stage for good, undone by a looming trial for corruption. Zuma was then in the midst of a high-stakes political battle with his former comrade in arms, President Thabo Mbeki—a struggle that would rip apart the African National Congress, scramble South Africa’s politics, and threaten the stability of the young democracy. But you wouldn’t have known any of this from Zuma’s imperturbable evenness. It said something about the culture of his party—particularly the emphasis ANC leaders place on the value of collective leadership and their disdain for American-style campaigning—that he’d begun our conversations with the idea that he harbored no personal ambition. And it said something about Zuma, too, that he would portray himself as a reluctant standard-bearer even as he was pressing the party’s allies on the left—the Youth League, trade-union federation, and Communist Party—to intensify a campaign that would ultimately place him in charge of the largest economy in Africa.

Zuma is a large-boned man with a shaved, bullet-shaped head. He carries himself in the loose-limbed manner of a natural politician, and the edges of his mouth regularly turn

up in a Mona Lisa smile, as if he’s just remembered an old joke. His cheeks are full and his skin unlined; he looks far younger than his 67 years. Tinted wire-rimmed glasses shade his heavy-lidded eyes, so it’s hard to know when he’s pulling your leg, or getting angry at the drift of your questions. He’s famously even-keeled—or *chill*, as his children say; they’ve never seen him lose his temper. Perhaps it’s not surprising, since he was once the intelligence chief of an underground revolutionary movement, that he’s developed the habit of giving so little away. His middle name, Gedleyihlekisa, means “the one who laughs while he endangers you.”

Zuma’s home in Johannesburg lies in the middle of the block on a dead-end street in a comfortable suburb of the city. It’s a two-story house, like others on the street, surrounded by high security walls. The walls are topped with electric sensors to warn of intruders. Inside them, highly trained agents keep watch from the driveway and the garden. Zuma’s closest supporters, justifiably or not, fear his assassination. His food is prepared only by people he has reason to trust.

The front door opens into a large, spare anteroom. Straight ahead, in the dining room, is an oblong table of polished blond wood around which political strategy has long been planned in late-night meetings. To the right, a wide staircase leads to the bedrooms upstairs. You can trace the trouble Zuma has gotten into in recent years just by considering the floor plan. In 2005, a crack unit of government agents, known as the Scorpions, streamed through the front

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gate and spread throughout the house, seizing computer hard drives and documents to support the criminal case they'd been building against him for corruption, racketeering, tax evasion, and fraud. To the left as you enter the house is the guest bedroom where, in late 2005, he allegedly raped a woman less than half his age. (He was acquitted in 2006, after a long, grueling, and deeply troubling trial.) On the day I first visited, two of his children—a 14-year-old son by his second wife, who committed suicide in 2000, and a 17-year-old daughter by his third wife, from whom he is now divorced—were doing homework at the long table. They seemed rather blasé about the recent dramatic developments in their father's life. "It's only *politics*," his daughter told me, echoing a refrain she hears regularly from him.

When Zuma entered the room, he was wearing a bulky green robe, having just come from an evangelical church service where he'd been made an honorary reverend. In the wake of the rape trial, he'd made an effort to cultivate conservative evangelicals. As we sat down to talk, he cautioned me, in the manner of a reproving parent, that I'd made a mistake in coming to see him. I didn't tell him so, but that was also the opinion of many of my South African friends, who considered him a spent force politically. "I'm not important," he said. "I'm just a cadre in the movement." He suggested I come back in the unlikely event he was elected leader.

On the surface, and from a distance, Zuma's rise toward South Africa's presidency looks like a case study in national devolution. Nelson Mandela, the country's first black president, was a lawyer before becoming the world's most famous political prisoner and the unifying figure behind the peaceful end of apartheid in 1994. Mandela's successor, in 1999, was Mbeki, a dapper intellectual with a master's degree in economics from the University of Sussex in Great Britain, and a darling of the World Economic Forum in Davos. Zuma, by contrast, is a former goatherd with no formal schooling who speaks spare, unadorned English. At party rallies, he sings and dances, crooning his signature struggle song, "*Awuleth' Umshini Wami*," or "Bring Me My Machine Gun." When he first emerged as a possible successor to Mbeki, letters to the editors of local newspapers predicted that he would turn out to be South Africa's Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean dictator who transformed the shining light of southern Africa into one of the most dysfunctional places on Earth. Members of the business class—black and white—consider him a dangerous populist and a crass rube. But if you followed him out of the city into the countryside, you'd see how he is greeted as a savior among the poor—especially among Zulus, members of the country's largest ethnic group, who count him as one of their own.

South Africa appears to be at a pivotal moment. The agreement that ended apartheid 15 years ago gave blacks the right to vote in exchange for a commitment not to alter the basic structure of the country's economy—no massive redistribution of land or wealth, no nationalizing of the mines. But this trade-off set the stage for a bedeviling challenge that the

government hasn't yet resolved: how to reconcile incongruent, coexisting worlds—one white and rich, the other black and poor.

A centrist macroeconomic policy pursued under Mandela and Mbeki stabilized the currency in the mid-1990s, ensuring South Africa wouldn't turn swiftly into another of the continent's failed states. And the lifting of international sanctions after the demise of apartheid provided a burst of growth. That growth, along with affirmative action and other measures, helped propel millions of blacks into the middle class. But for the vast majority of the mostly poor, mostly black followers of the ANC, the legacy of apartheid—poor education,

bad health care, separate development—remains. By 2007, with the world economy slowing, the national unemployment rate was running above 25 percent—for young workers, above 60 percent. Today, the chasm between rich and poor remains among the widest in the world, and the HIV epidemic has killed 2 million South Africans. Among many blacks, patience with the government has given way to pointed questions about how and when political equality will translate into economic gain.

Against this backdrop, Jacob Zuma has emerged as an unlikely tribune for a rebellion inside the ANC on behalf of the left.

Increasing numbers of ANC members and rural supporters have latched on to him in the belief that with his humble background, Zuma will make good on the party's 1994 promise of a "better life for all." Party strategists argue that he could turn out to be a unifying figure more like Mandela than like Mugabe, and that he is the best hope for reassuring the vast majority of black South Africans that the party of liberation has not forsaken them.

ZUMA LIKES TO SAY that his character was quarried from the landscape north of the Tugela River. The river's course marks a rough dividing line between territory once dominated by British colonial forces to the south and the traditional home villages of Zulu-speaking people to the north. South of the Tugela lie sugar-cane plantations, factories, and most of the public universities in what's now called KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. In the north, where Zuma grew up, whites are scarce. The area remains desperately poor, with rutted dirt roads, few schools, and sky-high rates of infection for both HIV and tuberculosis.

In 2001, Zuma began construction on a modest homestead there, on top of a ridge near Nkandla. When he needs relief from the hectic pace of life in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, where he also has homes, he regularly returns to it. "The environment is so calming," he told me one afternoon in late November 2007, as we wandered through the collection of freshly painted *rondavels* perched on a gently sloping hillside. "Why should you be a nervous person here?" he murmured, as if asking the question of himself.

Later, from the main house, with its thatched roof and stucco walls, Zuma waved in the direction of the mountains through which he'd herded goats and cattle as a boy. He called

The plan was straightforward enough: "We'd get there on a Saturday, unpack, and start butchering everybody," Zuma recalled.

the bluffs on the other side of the wide valley a mystical place, the land of “honey and cobras.” He was born to a poor mother in these hills in 1942; his father, a local police sergeant, paid him scant attention. An older half brother (now deceased), who joined the ANC, influenced him most politically among the grown-ups in his life, Zuma said.

We sat in plastic chairs on the porch, looking out over the valley shrouded in mist. While he was talking, a young daughter—one of about 20 children Zuma has fathered with an assortment of wives and mistresses—was brought over to sit on his lap by one of his junior wives; the mother and daughter both live in a *rondavel* downhill from the main house, which is presided over by Zuma’s first wife, Sizakele Khumalo, a formidable, sharp-tongued woman in her 60s whom Zuma courted when they were teenagers. Polygamy is accepted in Zulu culture and legal in the new South Africa, and Zuma makes no apologies for his full love life. Still, when I asked about his relationship with Khumalo, his eyes welled up. “Do you see this woman? This is my wife—my first wife,” he said. “People look at me, how much I sacrificed. They don’t look at her. She represents women who sacrificed but who are not known. They are in the quiet.”

He sketched the “emotional tale” of their separations—she’d waited for him for the 10 years he spent in prison, and then for 14 more years while he was in exile. She’d suffered a miscarriage shortly after he fled the country, he said, adding: “My heart was bleeding then.” When the police came to harass her during the years of Zuma’s absence, they brought along dogs to threaten her. Yet in all those years they were apart, she never considered breaking up. “My heart wouldn’t allow me to be negative,” Khumalo told me. “I just focused on the fact that he was coming back someday.”

These days, being at his ranch with Khumalo, his brothers and cousins, his children, and other family members helps Zuma “reconnect,” he said. He offered his daughter a slice of grilled beef, pulling it away when she lunged for it until she remembered to hold out both hands politely. “If I can’t identify with this area where I come from, and begin to be too high-flying ... I’m like a South African who’s floating in the air.”

This sounded like a considered slap at his rival, Mbeki, who’d appeared, during his service as president, to be more interested in playing a big role on the international stage than in getting to know the country from which he’d been exiled for nearly 30 years. Mbeki himself once characterized his early childhood and life in exile as disconnected, and through most of his presidency, he seldom mentioned his Xhosa heritage. Zuma pointed to the enclosure for his animals, the valley below, the terrain around the house: “This makes me to be on my feet, on the ground—a South African who grew up here in KZN, who is a Zulu with Zulu traditions [and] Zulu values pushed into myself,” he said.

Coming from an ANC leader, this was a rare expression of ethnic pride. During colonial rule and nearly half a century under apartheid, successive white governments exacerbated ethnic differences to keep the black majority fractured. And in the early 1990s, more than 10,000 people died in clashes between followers of the ANC and more-traditional Zulu-speakers allied with Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi’s Inkatha

Freedom Party. Although much of the most vicious fighting in Zuma’s home territory had been among Zulu-speakers, the killing in other parts of the country, especially in townships outside Johannesburg, had fallen along Zulu/non-Zulu lines. The danger of interethnic bloodletting has been a preoccupation of ANC party leaders, who espouse a strict “non-tribalist” policy. But by the time of my visit, in 2007, there were signs of a breakdown on this score within party ranks.

On the street, in public taxis, and in the townships you’d hear people casually denigrating the ANC as the “Xhosa Nostra,” a mafia for Xhosa-speakers (both Mandela and Mbeki are Xhosa-speakers). The public conflict between Mbeki and Zuma certainly played a part in inflaming ethnic tensions. But Zuma dismissed the idea that his unabashed Zulu pride might get in the way of his role as a national figure. “My love of South Africa is not gray, it’s not vague. It’s very specific,” he told me. “It’s in keeping with our Constitution—‘Unity in diversity.’ This is my diversity.”

ZUMA FOLLOWED HIS half brother into the ANC in the late 1950s. Dreams of resistance were already “in the basket,” he told me, gesturing toward his own head—placed there at an early age by stories of the Bambatha War, a 1906 uprising that marks the last sustained combat between white militias and Zulu-speaking people, and ended in a one-sided slaughter of blacks. Two survivors had lived out their days in Zuma’s village, and he remembered sitting long into the night, as a boy, listening to their tales of battle. “I then understood that the white man had actually taken the rights, and the land, of the black man,” he told me.

As a teen, he moved to a settlement outside Durban, where his mother found work as a maid. There, he began attending informal liberation schools set up by trade unionists and the ANC. In class, young activists soaked up what they could about national freedom movements sweeping to power all over Africa in the 1960s.

Around this time, Nelson Mandela was challenging the ANC’s commitment to the principle of nonviolence. A small group of boys including Zuma took up Mandela’s side of the argument. They’d come to admire the example of the Mau Mau guerrillas, who were responsible for a particularly bloody campaign to drive white settlers out of Kenya. The boys decided one day that they should launch a similar rebellion. They stashed bush knives in the hills and planned to take them into the city center one Saturday night to launch a sneak attack.

The plan was straightforward enough: “We’d get there on a Saturday, unpack, and start butchering everybody,” Zuma recalled. “Once they called the police, we would disappear. We would run off to a hiding place to conduct the war.” On the verge of carrying out their plan, the boys sent an emissary to get approval from ANC elders—who swiftly and emphatically shut down the plot. When Zuma told me this, he shrugged his shoulders as if it were nothing but an example of over-zealous youth. But it struck me that periodic recklessness, reined in by the collective leadership of the ANC, has traced the narrative of Zuma’s life.

In his early 20s, Zuma was arrested, along with a group of other militants, while attempting to leave the country. Tried

GALLERY Hope Hangover by Steve Brodner



and convicted for plotting to overthrow the white regime, he was sentenced to 10 years on Robben Island—"the University of Robben Island," his friends like to say—where he learned how to read and write in English and studied politics, partly under the guidance of Thabo Mbeki's father, Govan Mbeki, a Marxist scholar. A cell mate, Ebrahim Ebrahim, remembered Zuma as an imaginative guy who eased the anguish and boredom of prison life by spinning tall tales and teaching his comrades traditional Zulu dances. At the time, Zuma, under the influence of comrades who were "a bit ultra-leftist," espoused a down-the-line pro-Soviet orthodoxy, Ebrahim said. But despite their ideological differences, Ebrahim later served Zuma as an adviser and supported his bid for the presidency. He described Zuma during his prison years as a world-class listener with a canny understanding of human behavior—and a good leader, because he knew how to assuage hard feelings arising from political arguments.

After his 10-year sentence, Zuma came off Robben Island without having received a single visitor, by his own request. He returned to Nkandla and married Khumalo after promising her that he would steer clear of politics. But he soon resumed working in the underground armed wing of the ANC; within two years, he was forced into exile to escape arrest. He lived for more than 14 years in Swaziland, Mozambique, and Zambia, overseeing the military training of other South African exiles and rising to the post of ANC intelligence chief. It was a grinding, dangerous existence. The movement was riddled with spies reporting to the South African government. Zuma was part of an effort, called Mbokodo (crushing boulder), to identify and eliminate *impimpis* and *askaris*, as the

spies and traitors were known, in part through a series of brutal interrogations and summary executions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission later found the ANC "guilty of gross violations of human rights." Zuma generally refuses to discuss this period.

Although Zuma devoted himself to the armed struggle, he was instrumental in setting the stage for the settlement that was negotiated in 1993 and hailed around the world. In the years leading up to that agreement, he and Mbeki were an impressive pair—one representing the party's military might, the other its technocratic skill. Together, they dispelled the fear, among representatives of the ruling National Party, that ANC leaders would continue to pose a revolutionary menace after apartheid ended. By then, the party's inner circle, including Mandela, Mbeki, and Zuma, understood that the world

had changed; the Soviet bloc had come undone and socialist experiments elsewhere in Africa had failed. The party leaders feared that if they stuck to antiquated dogma, they might sink the hope for a new South Africa. When Zuma returned to the country in 1990, he followed the lead of Mbeki, renouncing his long-time membership in the South African Communist Party. Although struggle-era rhetoric remained embedded in party discourse, Zuma cast his lot with those who, like Mbeki and Mandela, didn't think the ANC's "National Democratic Revolution" was necessarily an interim step toward socialism.

SINCE 1994, ZUMA has climbed through a series of political posts. In 1999, when Mbeki succeeded Mandela as president of South Africa, Zuma joined the cabinet as deputy president, at his comrade's invitation. The two men were close; one former official, in a particularly graphic analogy, said they were "like tongue and saliva." But from the moment Zuma came within one step of the presidency, his relationship with Mbeki began to unravel. The breach between them, which Zuma himself presents as a baffling mystery, appears to have been precipitated partly by the ordinary stress of governing, partly by the paranoia that both men seem to share, and partly by the inevitable tensions within a diverse party, whose main unifying goal—ending apartheid—had been achieved as soon as it took power.

If those factors provided the conditions for the rupture, though, a \$5 billion series of contracts to purchase military equipment, dating back to 1999, provided the catalyst. The arms deal was riddled with fraud, bribes, and kickbacks to

the ANC. Subsequent investigations implicated a number of wheeler-dealers among the new elite, including a close friend of Zuma's, the Durban businessman Schabir Shaik. Shaik's older brothers had served in the resistance with Zuma, and Shaik had been a funnel for funds to the party while it operated underground. He became Zuma's chief benefactor after Zuma returned from exile, helping him through difficult financial times, as other businessmen had done for other leaders. Most returning ANC heroes came out of prison or exile with tremendous family obligations, no small measure of guilt for having neglected their spouses and children, and few opportunities to make money. Businessmen hoping to ingratiate themselves with the newly powerful bought homes and paid expenses for top party officials, including Nelson Mandela. In this way, the kind of necessarily secretive arrangements that had been used to fund the revolutionary movement shaded, in the new dispensation, into a more familiar story involving money and politics.

In 2005, Shaik was convicted on a range of charges, including soliciting a bribe from a French arms supplier on Zuma's behalf. On a live, national TV broadcast, the judge sentenced Shaik to 15 years in prison and detailed the many large payments he had made to Zuma. Zuma argued, as Shaik had, that the funds were simply loans and gifts to help support his family and his charity, not a quid pro quo. But Mbeki fired Zuma in a humiliating public address to the parliament, and corruption charges were brought against him shortly afterward—charges that would dog Zuma until just this spring, when they were finally abandoned under a cloud of political suspicion.

An entirely different kind of scandal broke a couple months later, in December 2005. A 31-year-old woman, the daughter of a former comrade, filed a charge of rape. Zuma claimed she'd been put up to it by his enemies. He spent early 2006 preparing for the rape trial. After a two-month proceeding, Zuma was acquitted—the sex deemed consensual—but he did himself no favors during his testimony. On the stand, he revealed antediluvian ideas about women (if a Zulu woman dressed provocatively, it meant she wanted sex, and it was a Zulu man's duty to satisfy her) and the triumph of impulse over judgment (he'd known the accuser was HIV-positive but had not had a condom on hand; he'd showered afterward in an attempt to protect himself). A cartoonist known as Zapiro drew him with a large, reptilian head with a showerhead implanted in it.

Zuma's more reptilian qualities—his cold-bloodedness and single-minded determination—may be what saved his political career. During my November 2007 visit to his home-
stead, I spoke with one of his brothers, Mike. As we stood by an enclosure where an ox had been slaughtered earlier in the day, Mike told me that his brother was clever, and should never be counted out. He said that from an early age, Zuma had been a masterful practitioner of traditional Zulu stick fighting. His distinctive technique had been to forego the formalities and hold his stick casually, as if he was on a lark.

He'd turn away from his opponent, crack a joke, and smile. When it was least expected, he would sweep the other boy off his feet. Stick fighting is essentially a test of balance, not brute strength, in which one turns an adversary's lunging attacks back on him. That seemed a neat enough description for what Zuma set out to do to Mbeki shortly after the president fired him.

"I knew that in order to meet this, I've got to move very carefully ... I did not get excited," Zuma told me. He searched out allies in the trade unions, Communist Party, and Youth League, and among the regional ANC officials he'd worked beside over the years—people who felt that Mbeki had not done nearly enough for workers and the rural poor. Zuma offered himself as an alternative, although he had never publicly broken with Mbeki's policies, and his allies began attacking the president by name, accusing him of being in thrall to business interests and stabbing his longtime comrade in the back. Harking back to the politicized trials that had sent ANC movement leaders to prison under apartheid, Zuma publicly floated conspiracy theories about the charges against him—

which his supporters echoed and amplified. Across the country, they began a branch-by-branch drive to flood local party chapters with younger, more militant new members engaged in a mass campaign to "take back" the ANC.

"It was a very tight campaign," one of Zuma's key strategists told me, making it sound like a military operation. And it was remarkably effective. The grievances of the young and the poor, given a little nourishment from the venerable party that had liberated South Africa, grew quickly in volume. Outside the Johannesburg High Court, over the course of Zuma's rape trial, thousands of his supporters rallied each day, some of them chanting "Burn the bitch!," others wearing

Over the course of Zuma's rape trial, thousands of his supporters rallied each day, some chanting "Burn the bitch!," others wearing T-shirts that read 100% ZULU BOY.

T-shirts that read 100% ZULU BOY, and most of them railing against Mbeki and the shadowy forces they believed to be behind the accusation. Support for Zuma inside the party surged, and what one leader called "a tsunami" building up on his behalf broke into the open.

IN DECEMBER 16, 2007, at a national convention of the ANC, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma sat side by side on a dais under a large tent near the town of Polokwane, which once served as a haven for guerrillas crossing into South Africa from neighboring states. Above them hung a huge banner that read ADVANCING IN UNITY TOWARDS 2012, but everything about the tableau was artifice. Each man had allowed his name to be placed in nomination for the party's presidency, the first time in half a century the post had been contested. Mbeki is a short, thin man with an elfin aspect, and on the day the convention opened he was wearing a simple blue knit shirt and khaki pants. Looking out on the rowdy delegates from across the country, he raised his overgrown white eyebrows, as if surprised to find himself in such company. He had more than a year left to serve as president of the republic, but he knew that if he lost control

of the party machinery at this convention, his power as head of state would also swiftly drain away.

At the moment, Mosiuoa “Terror” Lekota, the party’s chairman and an ally of Mbeki’s, was inadvertently helping Zuma demonstrate how quickly that could happen. As Lekota spoke, Zuma considered him idly, as he might track a herded goat. Zuma’s supporters jeered, rotating their hands in rapid circles as though they were fans at a soccer game signaling for a change of players. Twice, when it seemed as though the convention was about to tip into chaos, Zuma nodded his head slightly toward an ally, Secretary-General Kgalema Motlanthe. Each time, Motlanthe rose, waving Lekota aside and taking the podium, as the shouting died down and the 4,000 assembled party members jostled back to order.

Three days later, with ballots cast and votes counted, Zuma had beaten Mbeki by a wide margin—2,329 to 1,505. At the announcement, the crowd erupted into pandemonium. Onstage, the six seats for top officials were now filled by Zuma and five of his supporters. Swathed in green and gold, the colors of the ANC, Zuma glanced to his right, where his just-defeated rival sat in a heap on a metal folding chair, looking like an old umbrella broken in the wind.

For Mbeki, the worst was yet to come. In September 2008, a judge tossed out the charges of corruption against Zuma and in his lengthy decision gave support to the idea, originally put forward by Zuma’s lawyers, that the president and his cabinet had meddled in the case. This decision was later reversed on appeal, but not before the ANC National Executive Committee decided to withdraw Mbeki from the presidency. Rather than provoke a constitutional crisis, Mbeki resigned. His deputy president and a number of ministers departed with him. (A caretaker president was appointed to serve until the April election.) In the wake of the president’s resignation, Mbeki’s acolytes, including Terror Lekota, announced their intention to break away and form a new political party. Youth leaders around the country began calling them cockroaches or, worse, *askaris* and *impimpis*—the same words that in the apartheid years had described traitors and spies within the movement.

The day after the president was ousted, I reached Zuma by telephone at his home in Johannesburg. He said he found it sad that his one-time friend would not be allowed to finish his term. Sad or not, it was Zuma who’d personally delivered the news to Mbeki that he was about to be removed from office. “But then,” Zuma noted, “you know that he did much worse to me.”

LAST OCTOBER, 10 months after becoming chief of the ANC, Zuma visited the U.S. as heir apparent to the South African presidency. Within days of the world financial meltdown the previous month, South Africa’s currency had weakened and its stock exchange had slumped, causing worry among international investors. Under a Zuma administration, the party’s expansive plans—for everything from poverty alleviation in rural areas to building new

stadiums for the 2010 World Cup—would rely on high levels of foreign investment. So Zuma had flown across the ocean partly to ensure that fears of a leftward leap by the ANC wouldn’t shake America’s political and financial elite.

On his final day in the country, he barnstormed across Wall Street, meeting privately with investment bankers and editors at *The Wall Street Journal*. I caught up with him in a stuffy meeting room at the Harvard Club in Midtown, where a small group of powerful investors was gathered around a polished wood table to get a closer look at the new leader. Zuma, dressed in a conservative dark suit with the conventional red power tie, turned his palms up, as if to assure them that he’d come unarmed. Frank Wisner, then a vice chairman of the insurance giant AIG, drove right to the central concern in the room: Since the South African left—the trade unions and the Communist Party—had supported Zuma’s candidacy for the presidency, how would he “respond to pressure to change economic policy?”

“We are not going to change policy,” Zuma said, looking straight at Wisner and explaining, not for the first time that morning, that collective decision-making in the party meant that government policy was long settled. South Africa needed “balance,” he said, pushing his belly into the table. The economy would continue to require active intervention because the market still hadn’t corrected for historic patterns of race and class bias.

Mbeki’s administration had helped 12 million poor South Africans by providing social-security grants, Zuma said. “But we want to create a developmental state, not a welfare state.” The new government would revamp the education system, emphasize skills training, and quickly generate 5 million new jobs. Zuma hesitated for a moment, studying his palms, before continuing. Only a limited amount of time remained, he said, to make sure that the political liberation of 1994 would be followed, however belatedly, by the achievement of material freedom. Otherwise, the country might blow up. The persistence of vast inequality, he said softly, looking directly at Wisner, was “a time bomb.”

AN AUTUMN SUN was drifting toward the horizon like a limp balloon when Zuma and his entourage finally arrived at a rally in the hill country of Limpopo. It was the end of March, a month before the 2009 election, and Zuma had been campaigning ever since I’d seen him in New York. In an open field, people had begun gathering at nine that morning to see him. They were now pressed together by the tens of thousands, and they exploded in a frenzy of cheering and ululation when he came onstage. A young woman toward the front of the crowd, on Zuma’s left, held up a handmade cross, with his image and name at the top and a message painted in uneven letters: **BLACK JESUS**. Zuma raised his head, clasped his hands together, and bowed in her direction.

Across the country, this outsize love for Zuma was far from universal. As the campaign entered its final weeks, the ANC seemed likely to lose control of the Western Cape province

**A woman toward
the front of the
crowd held up a
handmade cross,
with Zuma’s
image and a
message painted
in uneven letters:
BLACK JESUS.**

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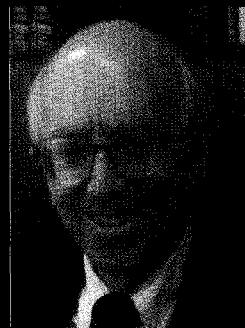
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to the Democratic Alliance, the largest opposition party. And in the Eastern Cape, home of Xhosa-speakers, polls indicated that the new party started by Mbeki supporters had made inroads. But in KwaZulu-Natal and several other provinces, the ANC was drawing unprecedented support. In poor townships and in rural communities, the party leader had been cheered just as he was here in Limpopo—as if he were the Messiah.

A few months before, the ANC had convened a series of focus groups of likely voters. Party strategists had listened as anger poured forth, directed toward both the ANC and the government, for the failure to turn lofty plans—for a better education system, the fight against crime, and economic uplift—into reality. “It was scary,” said one of the listeners. But the ANC’s historic role still bound most participants to the party; few planned to vote against it. Regarding Zuma, a racial split was clear: “White people think he’s guilty” of the corruption charges that have dogged him over the years, one of those who observed the focus groups said. “Blacks don’t think so.”

Weeks before the election, Zuma had already appointed a transition team to prepare for his inauguration in May. “You can’t help but feel these people need something to happen yesterday,” he told me the day after the Limpopo rally. “And you need to *move* ... We need to change things if we are going to succeed. We cannot succeed if we continue going at the same pace and with the same methodology.” When I reminded him that he’d promised investors in New York that the party’s economic policy would not change, he cleared his throat and began a disquisition about the difference between *necessary adjustments* and the *changes* that might upset foreigners. He turned to fix me with a stare, as if he was suddenly uneasy about the line he was walking. I asked, “Is that change you’re proposing a matter of degree, or a matter of kind?” He shifted in his seat, pausing. “Could be both,” he said.

I recalled the sign that had proclaimed him the “black Jesus,” thinking he might feel chastened by it. But he wasn’t. “It, to me, expressed the high expectations,” he said. “As you know, Jesus was an ultimate, the son of God brought here to help us. I think that this is what they think is going to be happening.”

I mentioned a searing front-page editorial I’d just read in the *Sunday Times*, the country’s leading weekend newspaper. The piece, “Killing the Dream to Save One Man,” was written by the paper’s editor, Mondli Makhanya, a former ANC activist in Zuma’s home province. He was commenting on the all-out effort by party leaders, including certain cabinet members, to pressure the National Prosecuting Authority not to pursue the corruption charges that had been lingering since 2005. Makhanya accused the ANC of using both “legal and sinister” means to get its leader off the hook. Standing by as Zuma escaped trial meant watching as a “power clique reduces our nation to one of those defective societies that the world pities,” he wrote. Zuma said, a little stiffly, that he hadn’t seen the editorial, so I read out the strongest passages. “The *Sunday Times* is a propaganda pamphlet,” not a newspaper, he said in a level voice, his expression impassive. The National Prosecuting Authority would ultimately drop its case against Zuma in early April, two weeks before the election.

ZUMA’S RISE—OR THE emergence of some other populist like him—was, perhaps, inevitable in South Africa, given the collision of political expectations and economic realities. The question now is whether he’ll be capable of connecting the populist energy he tapped in his campaign to some larger, transformative national purpose, or whether his administration will be characterized by crude redistributive measures and patronage, starting the country down a path that seldom leads to long-term prosperity.

The shirt that Zuma wore to the Limpopo rally was emblazoned with the image of Nelson Mandela. “Long live Jacob Zuma, long live!” the head of the party’s Youth League chanted as he warmed up the crowd. Zuma seemed rested and happy as he took the microphone. The main message in his speech was that the party of liberation had been in power for 15 years, and there were a few “shortcomings and gaps” in the government’s performance. He promised to do things differently by cracking down on corruption and holding officials accountable—comments that would be viewed as tragic irony by South Africa’s urban elite, but seemed to be accepted uncritically here. After he finished speaking, he clenched his fists, arched his arms forward, hunched his body, and began to sing “Bring Me My Machine Gun.” The crowd joined in with surprising force. The enthusiasm seemed weirdly nostalgic, a pining for a time when revolutionary change appeared about to burst, fully realized, into being. Zuma crooned on, swaying from side to side. He was light on his feet, a graceful dancer, but it was jarring, in a country with outlandish rates of violent crime, to see the putative leader rhapsodizing over what he might do with an AK-47.

When his dance was done, Zuma shimmied down the gangway, hands up and palms outstretched, lofted along by the cheers. He and his traveling companions quickly slid into a motorcade of luxury SUVs and BMW sedans. Sirens wailing, they zipped off. The woman with the large cross now had it wedged awkwardly beneath her arm. It struck me that her hero hadn’t explained to her why the ANC government had bungled the fight against AIDS or failed to create widespread opportunities for economic mobility. He hadn’t discussed how, in the midst of a global economic crisis, his government could bring on the dawn now. And he of course hadn’t broached the most pressing question: If he fails, after raising such high expectations, where might people who’d hailed him as their savior turn next?

The class divide in South Africa is increasingly marked by the line between those who ride and those who walk. In Limpopo, Zuma was whisked away by his bodyguards to his comfortable home in Johannesburg. The woman with the cross, who’d told me she really thought he could revolutionize her world, trudged with her large sign through the dusty field to her shack, in a community where people still empty human waste into buckets and have no electricity or running water. For the moment, she clutched the image of her savior, and hung on to an expression of her quasi-religious faith in him. ■

Douglas Foster is an associate professor at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism. He is at work on a book about politics and young people in post-transition South Africa.

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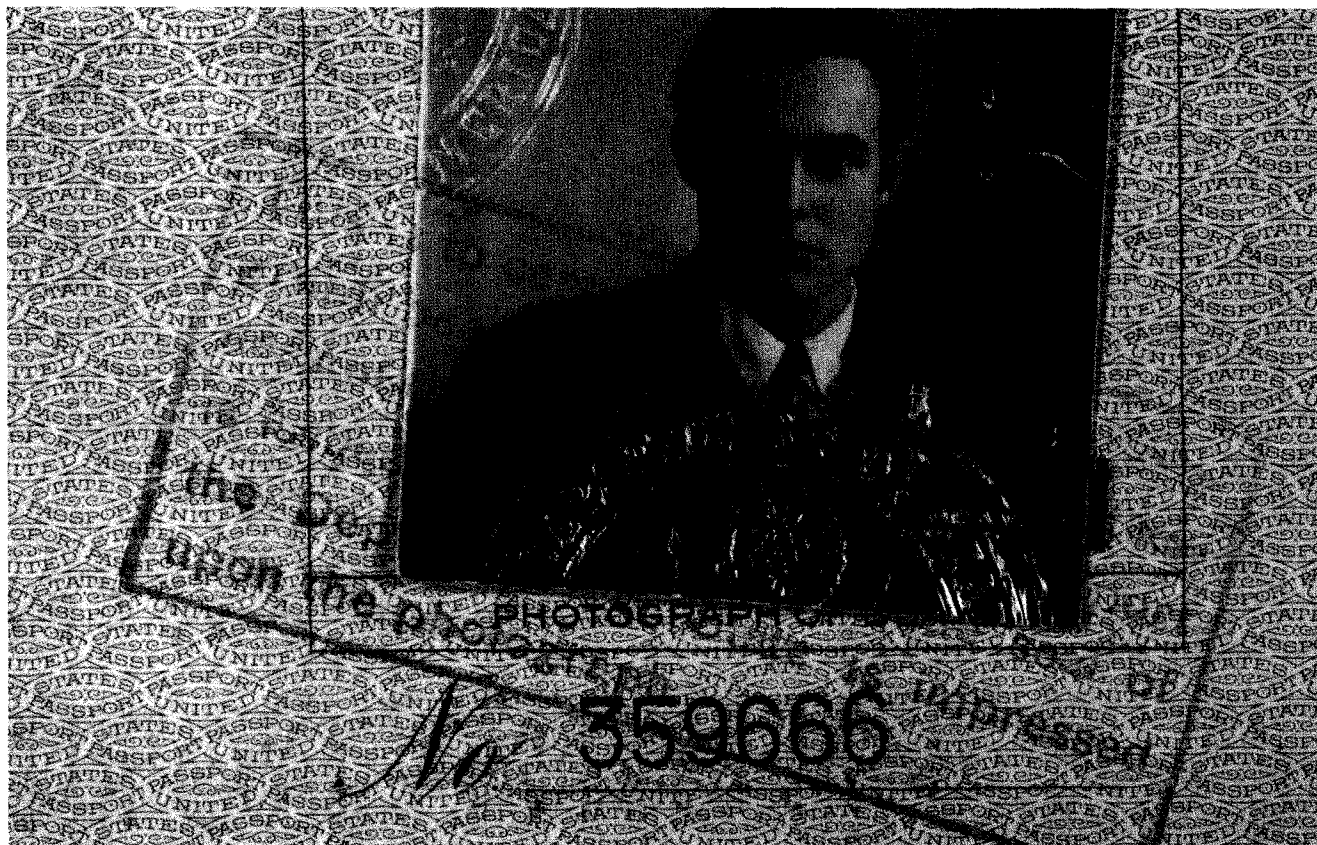
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BOOKS

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COVER TO COVER Reconsider the rhino; *Nightingale* unveiled; solar cells; admissions of guilt; and more



Ernest Hemingway's passport from 1923.

The Man in Full

IN A RESTORED EDITION OF HEMINGWAY'S *A MOVEABLE FEAST*, SEXUAL ANXIETY LOOMS LARGE.

By Christopher Hitchens

FOR REASONS sufficient to the writer," wrote Ernest Hemingway in notes for a preface to his collection of about-to-be-posthumous Parisian fragments (a preface later pieced together by Mary Hemingway as if from Cuba in 1960), "many places, people, observations and impressions have been left out of this book":

There is no mention of the Stade Anastasie where the boxers served as

waiters at the tables set out under the trees and the ring was in the garden. Nor of training with Larry Gains, nor the great twenty-round fights at the Cirque d'Hiver. Nor of such good friends as Charlie Sweeny, Bill Bird and Mike Strater ... It would be fine if all these were in this book but we will have to do without them for now.

This tactic of teasing the customer with the hint of splendors withheld—like Dr. Watson's making us wonder about the untold Holmes adventure of

the giant rat of Sumatra—was rounded off with another piece of coquetry, when "Papa" closed by saying:

If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact.

This challenge may or may not have been intended as literal. But the first thing to say about the "restored" edition so ably and attractively produced

by Patrick and Seán Hemingway is that it does live up to its billing, in that at last it gives us the Stade Anastasie and Larry Gains (a handsome black Canadian heavyweight now lost to history) and thus manages that fusion of food writing and pugilism that is somehow associated with Americans in Paris, and not just because of Papa and A. J. Liebling. The new story "A Strange Fight Club" is well worth having, too. It pictures Larry Gains's Parisian opponent thus:

The new heavy weight was a local boy who had been employed carrying parts of carcasses in the stockyards until he had an accident which affected his reasoning power.

This capture of the elemental brutishness of boxing—and by one of its aficionados—does a good deal to reaffirm Hemingway's sometimes mocked reputation as a master of the terse and muscular sentence.

There has always been much speculation about how much the redaction of

**A MOVEABLE FEAST:
THE RESTORED
EDITION**

Ernest Hemingway
SCRIBNER

A Moveable Feast is a product or consequence of its relation to the sequence of Hemingway's marriages. It was largely written about his time with Hadley, touches on his defection to the arms of Pauline, and after his suicide was pasted together by Mary. If we make the common assumption that Mary desired to downplay her predecessors where possible (there is no way to write the lovely Hadley out of the script altogether), then this would furnish an explanation for the reappearance of two fragments in particular: the marvelous little study of Hemingway's outings with his first-born son, titled "The Education of Mr. Bumby," and the intriguing episode "Secret Pleasures," in which Hemingway writes with undisguised sexual excitement about the good and bad "hair days" that he shared with his first spouse.

The Bumby pages are frankly sentimental but nonetheless somehow dry, while the little boy's attempts to be a man in two languages, and to keep up with his father's enjoyment of café society, are

simply charming. (Once you have heard the proprietress of Shakespeare and Company grandly referred to as "Silver Beach," you are doomed to remember her that way. And you will perhaps also recall Bumby's announcement of what he has learned from his nanny's husband, Touton: "*Tu sais, Papa, que les femmes pleurent comme les enfants pissent?*" A different version of Papa, to be sure, but one worth having.)

Even in this record of spontaneous innocence, however, the chance is not missed to take another sidelong whack at Scott Fitzgerald:

"Monsieur Fitzgerald is sick Papa?"

"He is sick because he drinks too much and he cannot work."

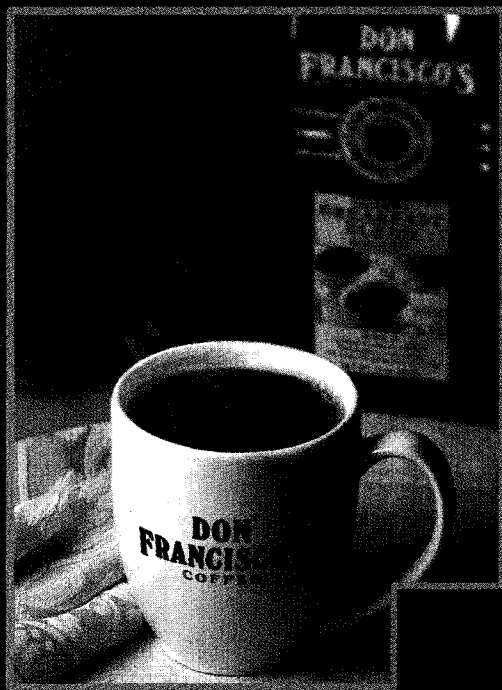
"Does he not respect his métier?"

"Madame his wife does not respect it or she is envious of it."

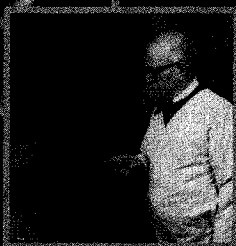
"He should scold her."

"It is not so simple."

Again, there is nothing to complain of here in point of terseness and economy, but it sent me back again to that supremely unsatisfactory moment in the



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original collection, in the chapter titled "A Matter of Measurements," when Fitzgerald invites Hemingway to lunch at Michaud's restaurant and tells him:

"Zelda said that the way I was built I could never make any woman happy and that was what upset her originally. She said it was a matter of measurements. I have never felt the same since she said that and I have to know truly."

By his own account, Hemingway thereupon leads the author of *The Diamond As Big As the Ritz* out to the men's room, conducts a brief inspection, and reassures (or, to be more exact, fails to reassure) his pal that all is well, and that he's looking down on his penis, literally and figuratively, rather than taking the sidelong perspective. I have never trusted this story, if only because—as Hemingway himself later admits—"it is not basically a question of the size in repose. It is the size that it becomes." So, unless the viewing in the Michaud *pissoir* was of an engorged and distended "Scottie"—which it plainly was not—then Papa was offering Fitzgerald a surrogate form of consolation. And was then planning to write about it! (That Zelda was a lethal bitch who wanted her husband at least to fail and perhaps to die is for once not confirmed by another new inclusion, "Scott and His Parisian Chauffeur," where she is pictured as behaving really quite gracefully under pressure and where the same Mike Strater whose absence was deplored in the original preface is also shown in a fairly good light on a train from Princeton to Philadelphia.)

I suppose that another way of betraying a friend of whom it's thinkable that you were jealous, and who would, as it happens, do you the good turn of introducing you to an editor like Maxwell Perkins and a publisher like Scribner, would be to write about him thus:

Scott was a man then who looked like a boy with a face between handsome and pretty. He had very fair wavy hair, a high forehead, excited and friendly eyes and a delicate long-lipped Irish mouth that, *on a girl*, would have been the mouth of a beauty [*italics mine*].

All right so far, perhaps, even with that emphasis noted, but then: "The

mouth worried you until you knew him and then it worried you more." And this in the second paragraph of the first page of the chapter about his friend—the one he is later on bluffly cheering up about his sand-castle masculinity ...

It might be trite to pick on the verb *worried*, but undue or conspicuous anxiety about such matters has been known to furnish a clue about the author himself, and Hemingway more or less forces one to contemplate this very contingency. The brilliance of the anecdote in "A Strange Enough Ending," in which the author bids adieu to Gertrude Stein and her partner, is that it is almost the sound of the other shoe dropping after that rugged earlier moment in "Miss Stein Instructs," in which Stein dismisses male homosexuality as truly and horribly unnatural. Hemingway writes,

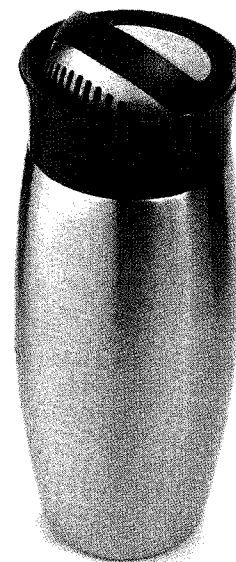
I heard someone speaking to Miss Stein as I had never heard one person speak to another; never, anywhere, ever.

Then Miss Stein's voice came pleading and begging, saying, "Don't, pussy. Don't. Don't, please don't. I'll do anything, pussy, but please don't do it. Please don't. Please don't, pussy."

As someone wrote about Dorothy Parker's short story "Big Blonde," the talent (I won't say genius) here lies in getting the reader's imagination to shoulder the bulk of the work. A pretty revenge, I dare say, if slightly and crudely rubbed in a few lines later when Miss Stein is described as resembling "a Roman emperor."

And so to the excerpt that has continued to excite perhaps the most comment. Closing the original chapter in which Miss Stein expresses her loathing for male perversion, Hemingway writes that he went home to Hadley and "in the night we were happy with our own knowledge we already had and other new knowledge we had acquired in the mountains." Read these words alongside the following lines originally excised from the restored chapter titled "Secret Pleasures": "When we lived in Austria in the winter we would cut each other's hair and let it grow to the same length." Presuming these to have been the same mountains, or even perhaps

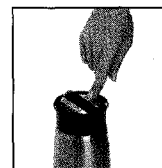
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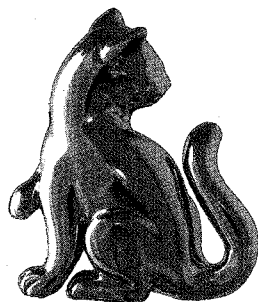
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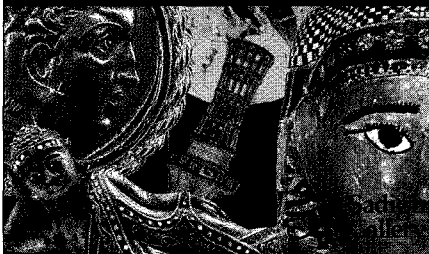
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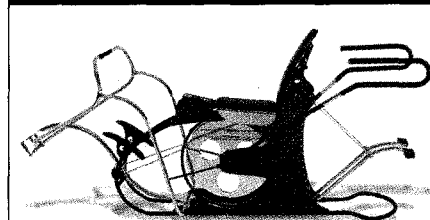
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assuming slightly different peaks, the whole concept of matching coiffure appears to Hemingway to have been almost unbearably exciting:

"If you don't think about it maybe it will grow faster. I'm so glad you remembered to start it so early."

We looked at each other and laughed and then she said one of the secret things ...

"How long will it take?"

"Maybe four months to be just the same."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Four months more?"

"I think so."

We sat and she said something secret and I said something secret back.

Gosh. And this, as some addicts will already know, is merely an *amuse-bouche* for the main course of another unfinished Hemingway effort, "The Garden of Eden," at the end of which it seems that hair must be discarded altogether, and shaved heads become the sexual totem. Not even Adam and Eve went so

far in their admission of guilt and nakedness, but perhaps a man whose mother once dressed him as a girl and trimmed his crop to suit, and crooned to him as "Ernestine," had some old scores to settle in the androgyny column.

What is it exactly that explains the continued fascination of this rather slight book? Obviously, it is an ur-text of the American enthrallment with Paris. To be more precise, it is also a skeleton key to the American literary fascination with Paris (and contains some excellent tips for start-up writers, such as the advice to stop working while you still have something left to write the next day). There are the "wouldn't be without, even if you don't quite trust" glimpses of the magnetic Joyce and the personable Pound and the apparently wickedly malodorous Ford Madox Ford. Then there are the moments of amusingly uncynical honesty, as when Stein and Toklas met Ernest and Hadley and "forgave us for being in love and being married—time would fix that." The continued currency of that useless expression *the lost generation* becomes even

more inexplicable when it is traced to a stupid remark made by Gertrude Stein's garage manager, and such quotable fatuity, however often consecrated by repeated usage, is always worth following to its source. Most of all, though, I believe that *A Moveable Feast* serves the purpose of a double nostalgia: our own as we contemplate a Left Bank that has since become a banal tourist enclave in a Paris where the tough and plebeian districts are gone, to be replaced by seething Muslim *banlieues* all around the periphery; and Hemingway's at the end of his distraught days, as he saw again the "City of Light" with his remaining life still ahead of him rather than so far behind.

NB: This book is best read or reread in the company of a beautiful book of photographs and quotations: Hemingway's Paris, edited by Robert Gajdusek and published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1978. ■

Christopher Hitchens is an Atlantic contributing editor and a Vanity Fair columnist.

Editor's Choice will return next issue.



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Touched by Evil

THE REAL SPIRITUAL DRAMA IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S FICTION WAS EVEN DARKER THAN THE ONE SHE ACKNOWLEDGED.

By Joseph O'Neill

FOR YEARS I was under the impression that Flannery O'Connor was Irish—a Kerryman, perhaps—and without doubt a male link in the concatenation featuring Flann O'Brien and Frank O'Connor. The delusion belonged to the fog in which one's early and unsystematic encounters with literature, and indeed the world, take place. My own fog was thickened by growing up in a Dutch town. The only sizable store of books in English was the American Book Center, a faintly indecent basement establishment mainly stocked, unless I misremember, with *Mad* comics and X-rated-looking publications. At the far end of the store was a wall of poetry (I now marvel, *Why? Which hero was behind that?*), and it was during

half hours spent at that wall, wearing a figurative mackintosh, that I was blown away by *Ariel* without knowing that Sylvia Plath had killed herself, and fell under the spell of *North* clueless as to who Seamus Heaney might be.

The force of such pure shocks of language—made only more blissful by the merely flickering intelligibility, to my immature self, of versified English—features significantly in the work of O'Connor, which gives us characters who are, in their empty-headedness, unusually vulnerable to the thrilling mystery of religious speech. More generally, it's a force that highlights one's natural ambivalence about biography and the cloud it places between the reader and the words. The

mystery of the unknown is lost; distractions creep in. It is questionable, for example, that an appreciation of V. S. Naipaul's work is much improved by knowing the particulars of his marital nastiness, or that the value of such improvement exceeds its cost—namely, a diminishment in the autonomy that an artistic text formally, if feebly, claims

for itself. Fiction necessarily insists on a separation between itself and an extrinsic world that includes the possibly vile, possibly virtuous

author: Why, otherwise, create a self-contained body of words? How, otherwise, can a novel generate its moral authority?

The literary significance of mystery, the interrelations of fictive text and

FLANNERY

By Brad Gooch

LITTLE, BROWN

MARC YANKUS

actual text-maker—these are particularly charged issues in the case of Flannery O'Connor. Her work (like that of Plath, a contemporary) is hard for a reader to approach without being dazzled by a high beam of personal myths—the reclusiveness, the lupus, the pathetically short lifespan (1925–1964). Now we have Brad Gooch's *Flannery*, its subject's first major biography and a more controlled illumination of the background to O'Connor's two novels and two story collections. Note that nine further stories may be found in the Library of America's exemplary *O'Connor*, a single, ingot-like volume that, in addition to the collected fiction, contains select essays, lectures, and letters, not to mention a penetrating chronology of the life. Therefore *Flannery* qualifies *O'Connor*, which is as it should be.

Externally, Flannery O'Connor's life was, except in the matter of her physical travails, uneventful. As she noted with satisfaction, "Lives spent between the house and the chicken yard do not make exciting copy." After all, she was born into the Georgia bourgeoisie, a milieu rarely thought of as action-packed. The O'Connors, descended from mid-19th-century immigrants from Ireland, were unexceptional specimens of the middle class. The Clines, Flannery's maternal line, were also Irish Catholic, but posher and more prosperous, though it is not clear from Gooch's account precisely how their ethnic/religious identity affected their position in the local pecking order (a pity, because social nuances are important in O'Connor's fiction). Flannery grew up—in Savannah and in Atlanta and, from 1938, in the Cline mansion in Milledgeville—with black servants floating around and a sense of herself as part of the genteel, bigoted, spottily educated stratum of landed whites. An only child, she was treated as a brilliant case almost from infancy. Though she was hopeless at math and spelling, everyone seems to have recognized that her confidence and strangeness—the young Flannery was sardonic,

marginal, good at cartooning, obsessed with ducks and chickens—were the signs of giftedness. Hers was a well-nurtured, happy childhood, except that in 1941 her gentle, failed-realtor father died from lupus erythematosus, an incurable disease in which the immune system fatally attacks the sufferer's vital organs.

The following year, Flannery went off to Georgia State College for Women—

went off being slightly misleading, given that the college was a block from her home. There she began to write with growing seriousness. Although O'Connor is commonly perceived as an outsider artist—the crippled, eccentric scribbler—she was in fact from the beginning very much an insider. Her career ladder, with its institutional rungs, was a prototype of the ladder young writers

still seek to scramble up. Indeed, they'd kill for the résumé:

- 1945–48:** University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, winning prizes and fellowships. Magazines begin publishing her stories.
- 1948–49:** Lengthy residence at Yaddo, stories in *Partisan Review*.
- 1952:** First novel, *Wise Blood*, published.
- 1955:** *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (stories). Finalist, National Book Award, and a commercial hit.
- 1956 and onward:** Fellowships and O. Henry Awards and lecturing invitations and grants (including \$8,000 from the Ford Foundation).
- 1960:** *The Violent Bear It Away* (novel). Finalist, National Book Award.
- 1965:** *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (stories). Finalist, National Book Award.
- 1971:** *The Complete Stories*. Winner, National Book Award.
- 1971–:** Literary immortality.

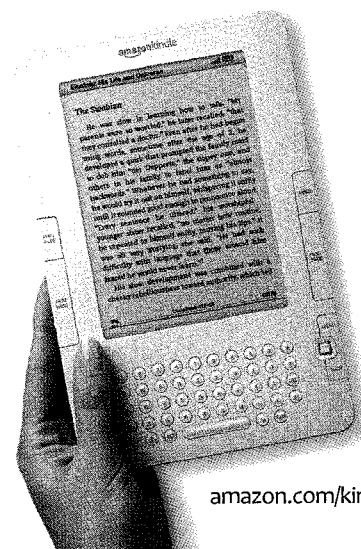
Thus O'Connor never experienced professional hardship. Her belief in herself and sense of vocation were never

Flannery O'Connor's preoccupations are so insistent that it is probably not ideal to read her work from beginning to end in one go, as I did.

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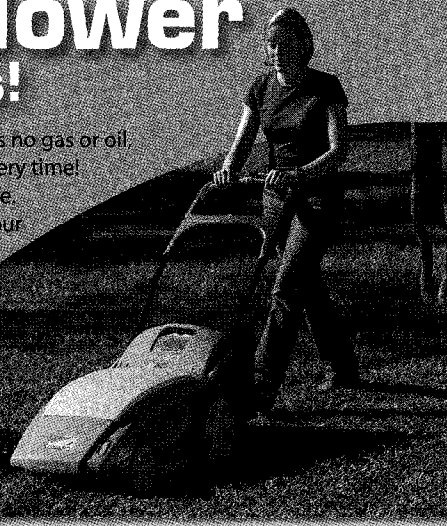
shaken. She was famous and revered by her early 30s. ("How we did adore and envy them, the idols of our college years—Hemingway and Faulkner, Frost and Eliot, Mary McCarthy and Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty!" wrote John Updike. He was seven years younger than O'Connor.) She never lacked for a prestigious mentor (Robert Lowell, Philip Rahv, Robert Penn Warren) or for helpful friends. She never had to take a job. From 1951, she lived at Andalusia, the Georgia property (500 acres of fields and 1,000 acres of woods) co-owned and farmed by her mother, Regina, which turned out to be the perfect habitat for her imagination. Her personal needs were few: she seemingly never wanted, and therefore was never distracted by, children or by her lack thereof. Ditto, pretty much, lovers. Genuinely cerebral, she apparently received ample emotional gratification from her collection of exotic barnyard fowl (peacocks and swans as well as chickens), from her piety, and from her intellectual endeavors. She regularly entertained visitors and was sustained by the friendship of interesting and loyal correspondents, Elizabeth Bishop among them. In sum, she was a great writer but also a fortunate one. This bears emphasizing in light of her exceedingly unfortunate medical history.

To summarize: O'Connor was diagnosed with lupus when she was 25, although she was not told the truth for more than a year. The disease caused her joint pain in the arms, hips, and shoulders; required blood transfusions and ACTH injections and bed rest; weakened her horribly. There was severe hair loss, and at 29 she needed a cane to walk. At 34, she had trouble eating because of necrosis in her jaws; thereafter her ailments became ever more painful and grotesque and immobilizing, as if her well-being had been entrusted to Samuel Beckett. But O'Connor unwell was as purposeful and witty and free of desperation as O'Connor healthy. She was given to dutifulness, religious and artistic, and this strengthened her. She put in two hours a day at the typewriter, even after receiving the sacrament of the dying.

O'Connor was a fervent Roman Catholic—a "thirteenth century" Catholic, as she described herself. She read

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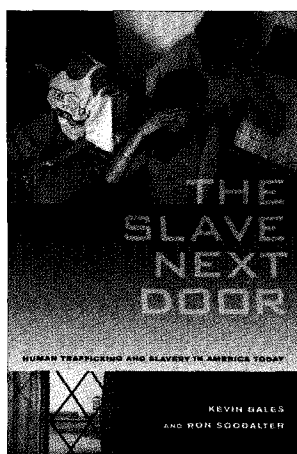
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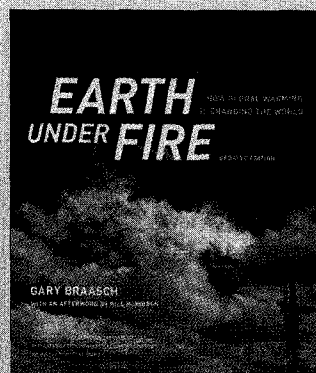
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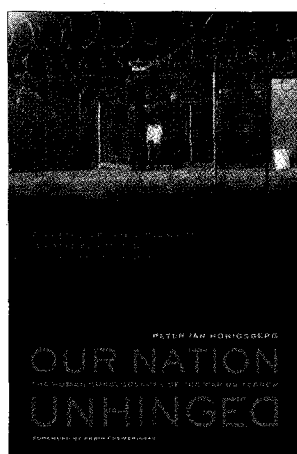
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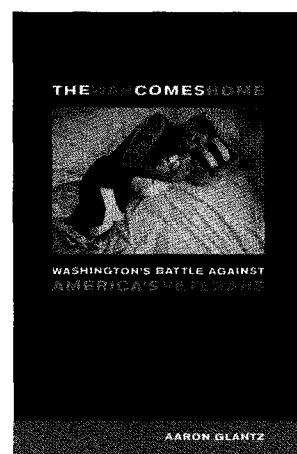
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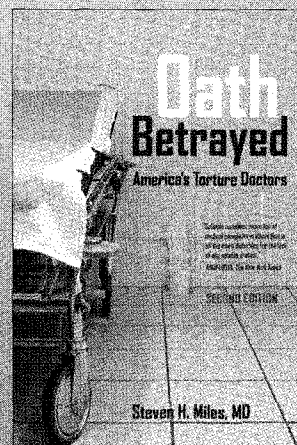
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deeply into theology, with a special interest in Teilhard de Chardin. She went to Mass every day she could, invariably accompanied by her mother. Flannery and Regina's claustrophobic, mutually dependent relationship was inevitably vexing for both women—and mortifying for the daughter when the mother revealed to visitors her own less than edified social attitudes. These domestic circumstances, in combination with Flannery's religiosity and visibly worsening health, hardly form a propitious setup for a gentleman caller. But one did materialize. In 1953, she began to receive visits from Erik Langkjaer, a handsome, thoughtful Dane whose work as a college-textbook salesman regularly brought him to the Milledgeville area. The friendship became, Gooch writes, "at least tinged with romance." On a drive together, they shared a fateful kiss. Langkjaer, in one of the biography's most powerful passages, remembers this:

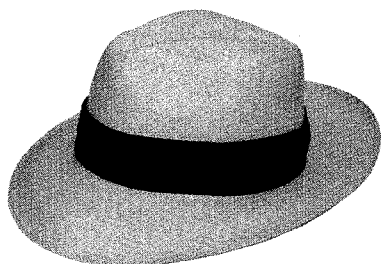
She had no real muscle tension in her mouth, a result being that my own lips touched her teeth rather than lips, and this gave me an unhappy feeling of a sort of *memento mori*, and so the kissing stopped ... I had a feeling of kissing a skeleton, and in that sense it was a shocking experience.

It is very hard, reading this kind of thing, not to feel great sympathy for O'Connor and mix the feeling into one's evaluation of her work. She herself would have rejected such a mixture. "My lupus has no business in literary considerations," she maintained. This was true not only for critics but for the writer herself. O'Connor's fiction gives few signs of her disease. *Wise Blood* was more or less completed before the diagnosis, and her subsequent writing obviously was cut from the same pre-lupine bolt of obsessions.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S preoccupations are so insistent that it is probably not ideal to read her work from beginning to end in one go, as I did. Again and again, the same dynamic impresses itself: A and B and—why not?—C reveal their more or less cretinous moral natures and slide toward a bizarre, often violent crisis, the whole production unfolding

Enjoy the sun

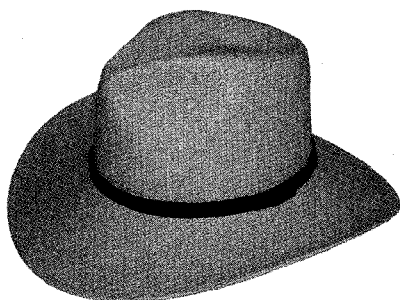
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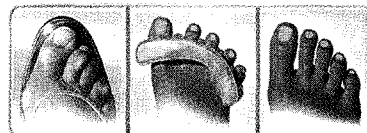
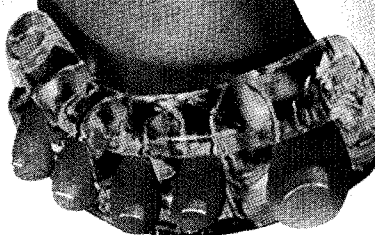
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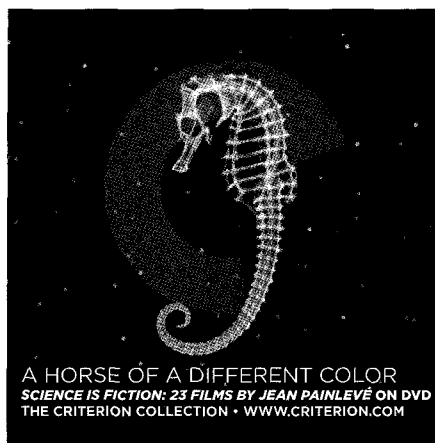


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under the auspices of a solar or lunar drama ("A fat yellow moon appeared in the branches of the fig tree as if it were going to roost there with the chickens"). Her settings are agrarian, static, unscientific, largely insulated from modern modes of information and movement. We are given a tragicomic world of dirt roads, pigs, girls who are "practically morons," "trashy" whites, idiotic "niggers," and every stripe of schemer and nitwitted chatterer. The dramatic premises are almost premodern, very easily concerned with religious visionaries or with the arrival, into an unchanging locale, of a stranger. Grassroots evangelical Protestantism and its defective adherents are objects of fascination, though the appearance of an urbane secular party is generally a cue for a particularly grievous display of stupidity and pride. The characters are not "likeable," but my God they are alive. The writing is almost unfairly good:

She lay her head back and as he watched, gradually her eyes closed and her mouth fell open to show a few long scattered teeth, some gold and some darker than her face; she began to whistle and blow like a musical skeleton.

Or (upon the arrival of refugee Poles at a farm):

She began to imagine a war of words, to see the Polish words and the English words coming at each other, stalking forward, not sentences, just words, gabble gabble gabble, flung out high and shrill and stalking forward and then grappling with each other. She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty. She saw them all piled up in a room, all the dead dirty words, theirs and hers too, piled up like the naked bodies in the newsreel. God save me, she cried silently, from the stinking power of Satan!

The narrating third person hovers in an almost miraculous fusion of proximity and comic distance. With O'Connor, there never seems to be space between the words and their creator's sensibility. You almost never catch a whiff of authorial self-consciousness. About how many writers can this be said?

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Of course, you cannot help asking, Are we humans really so awful? Is the world really like this? O'Connor wrote several essays/lectures on these and related questions:

I am always having it pointed out to me that life in Georgia is not at all the way I picture it, that escaped criminals do not roam the roads exterminating families, nor Bible salesmen prowl about looking for girls with wooden legs.

But her own circumstances, in their sadness and oddness, corroborated her dark fantasies, and, as Gooch shows, many of her stories' outlandish elements were inspired by actual events. O'Connor declared herself a realist, albeit one pushing "toward the limits of mystery." Mystery, in her mind, was concerned with "the ultimate reaches of reality," which is to say, the agency of the divine in human affairs. This is where things become problematic—where the churchgoer glosses her gloriously sullen fiction.

O'Connor was dismissive of any pressure, whether of religious or secular origin, for more "positive" fiction. She saw no contradiction between her faith and her art. Just the opposite: "Because I am a Catholic I cannot afford to be less than an artist." However, she stated,

the novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural.

This assertion, taken together with O'Connor's assertion that the central mystery is why human existence "has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for," constitutes the following argument: (1) from the Christian viewpoint, the modern human condition is filled with a peculiar horror; (2) therefore, to fictionally depict humans in their peculiarly horrifying aspect is necessary in order to explore the mysteries of redemption and grace.

The problem with (1) is that the Christian viewpoint does not necessitate a heightened sensitivity to that which is loathsome about humans or modern times. A heightened love of humans and the lives they create for themselves could just as easily be argued. There is a further problem. The repugnancy of O'Connor's characters is, in her portrayal, connected to their poverty and backwardness. Yet in the essays, she is anguished by, and fundamentally hostile to, the forces—ostensibly progressive—that ask us "to form our consciences in the light of statistics." She is hostile, in other words, to the enlightened disturbance of the culture

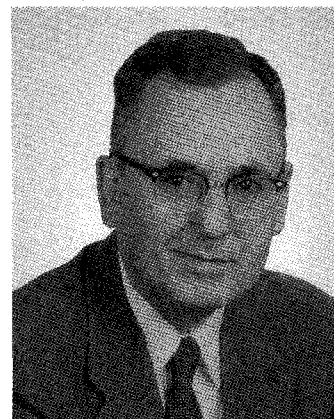
of which the poverty and backwardness are part, and in which characters repugnantly find themselves. Some readers may find that here O'Connor is herself repugnant: that they are faced with one of those people for whom the misery and injustice of human affairs is chiefly a source of egocentric intellectual gratification, and whose political and moral instincts are distorted accordingly.

However, it is precisely this troubling feature that gives O'Connor's work its strange power.

One problem with O'Connor the exegetist is that she narrows the scope of her work, even for Catholic readers. To decode her fiction for its doctrinal or supernatural content is to render it dreary, even false, because whatever her private purposes, O'Connor was above all faithful to a baleful comic vision derived, surely, from an ancient, artistically wholesome tradition of misanthropy. Nonetheless, a spiritual drama is playing out. Only it is not the one put forward by the self-explaining author, in which she figures as an onlooker occupying the high ground of piety. On the contrary, Flannery O'Connor's criticism reveals her as scarily belonging to the low world she evokes. She was touched by evil and no doubt knew it. That is what makes her so wickedly good. ■

Joseph O'Neill is the author of *Netherland*.

Scientists studying the universe have concluded that its basic properties are uncannily suited for life. They say, "There are so many life friendly properties that physicists cannot dismiss them as mere accidents. Tweak the laws of physics in just about any way—in this universe anyway—and life as we know it would not exist—nor would we."



Richard W. Wetherill
1906-1989

After reading that paragraph, ask yourself how are people treating our amazingly fine-tuned habitat? Answers might vary, but most would agree that it is often misused to serve human purposes.

This essay intends to draw people's attention to their nonconformance to a little-known law of nature, causing them untold physical, mental, and/or emotional misery as well as any disregard for the safety of planet Earth.

Early in the past century Richard W. Wetherill identified that natural law and presented it in a book entitled, *Tower of Babel*, published and on sale in January 1952. Its correction technique was copied by psychologists in the Philadelphia area, but the book's reference to a natural law of behavior was ignored.

Wetherill's epiphanies and a study of his behavior and that of many thousand others had revealed people's wrong attitude toward the realities of life. After eons of human efforts to quiet turbulent human affairs, they still cry out for solutions.

If we reason from the fact that this planet is the only place in the universe that supports life as we know it, Wetherill suggests the following:

Whoever or whatever created this perfectly constructed planet also created a law governing its inhabitant's behavior. Wetherill called it the **law of absolute right: Right action gets right results**. It defines right as what is truly logical, rational, and honest. As with creation's laws of physics, only by conforming to this behavioral law do people solve their problems and avoid further trouble.

It is well known that not conforming to natural laws results in trouble of one kind or another. By failing to take right action, people unwarily invite myriad problems and trouble that, sooner or later, cause each person's death. No argument here; death is what has

been happening from the beginning of human life to the present generation.

No claims are being made. We are presenting facts that can be verified by anybody observing the cause-and-effect sequence of human existence.

We think that this perfectly constructed universe calls for perfectly behaving occupants and that that result can be achieved when enough persons do their best to conform to nature's behavioral law mentioned earlier.

Wetherill often spoke of the need for a microcosm of a rational society to display right results for others to observe. The adult population of the United States of America *could* be that microcosm in our world population of over seven billion. Don't hesitate! The persons who are conforming to nature's law of behavior are enjoying the right results that the law promises.

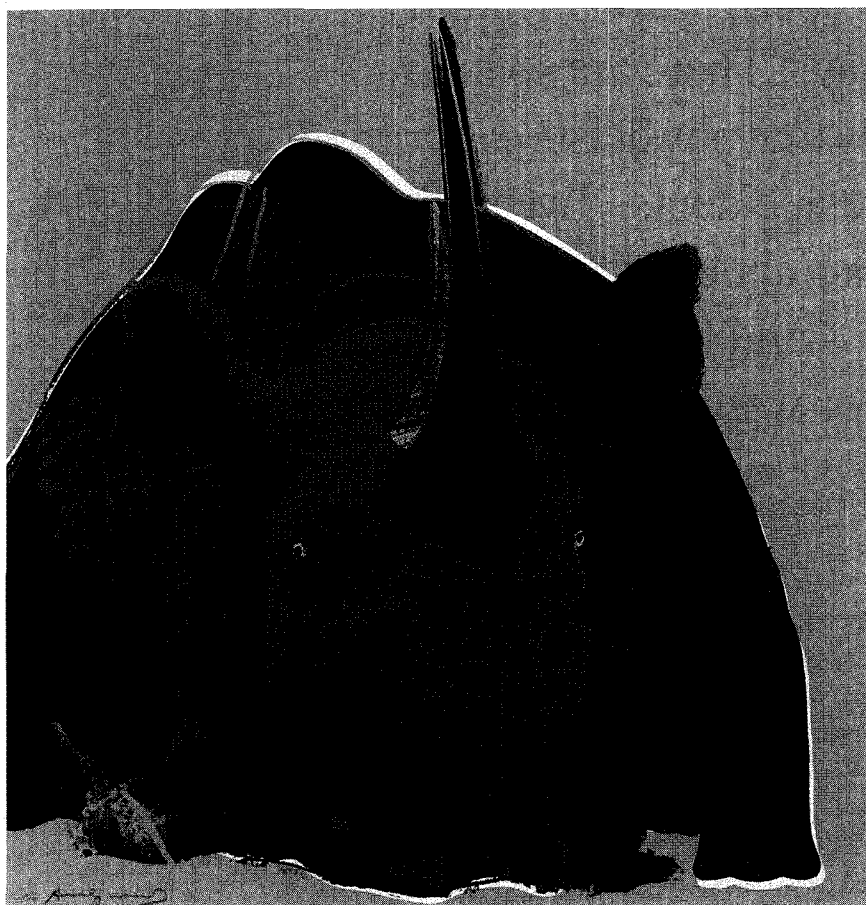
No instructions were given ancient peoples regarding a law of gravitation, but they learned to conform to it to stay out of trouble with the force of gravity. Please regard this public-service message as a wake-up call for readers to adapt their behavior to conform to nature's law of absolute right. Be assured, people's truly rational, honest behavior extends the beneficent intent of whoever or whatever created this life-friendly universe and us.

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COVER TO COVER

A Guide to Additional Releases



Rhinoceros

Kelly Enright

REAKTION

The latest monograph in the winning Animal series—truly natural histories, each title a wide-ranging look at a single creature, replete with splendid illustrations—is perhaps the finest yet. Like its predecessors, this volume alternately informs, delights, moves, and astonishes. Success here owes as much to author as to subject. The former, a cultural and environmental historian, acquits herself admirably, distilling fact from fiction, employing supple and incisive prose, and trailing casual acumen in her measured wake. On the latter count, well, few animals have seen their appearance (horned, armored), reputation (fearful, violent), and temperament (shy, solitary) more cartoonishly conflated. Though its endangered status, shrinking habitat, and coveted horn (widely used in Asian medicine) have brought it some measure of modern sympathy and

acclaim, the rhinoceros remains among the most misunderstood of beasts (and mistaken, on a genuinely mythical level: it was long considered a unicorn). Sketched by Dürer, demonized by Pliny, prized by Hemingway, and ridiculed by Barnum, it is only now being considered in toto, by Enright.

In the Kitchen

Monica Ali

SCRIBNER

On the cusp of realizing his dreams—opening his own restaurant (haute cuisine, perfectly executed) and proposing to his remarkably attractive girlfriend—the executive chef of a London hotel finds himself running way, way off the rails. Ambitiously, as in her first novel, the widely acclaimed *Brick Lane*, Ali embeds her main character's personal crisis in the swirl of multicultural London; the hotel's kitchen is staffed

with recent immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, India, and Eastern Europe, their histories dark, mysterious, and distinctly un-British. Juxtaposed against the mosaic population of this still-booming service industry are the English in the dying northern mill town of the chef's childhood, pushed up and over, if not out, 30 years ago by an influx of Pakistanis. In one of the novel's most moving scenes, two old mill workers, one English and one Pakistani, obviously have far more in common, and more sympathy, with each other than either has with his own grandchildren.

Florence Nightingale

Mark Bostridge

FSG

Devout and unforgiving, inexhaustible and chronically unwell, the farsighted and exacting Florence Nightingale famously gnawed her way through the barriers that kept genteel Victorian women trapped “in a meaningless round of trivial occupations” in order to promote her vision of a modern public health-care system. Both driven (her selected writings will fill a projected 16 volumes) and driving (she could be said to have worked two of her loyal supporters to death), she always put her cause first, with remarkable results. As Bostridge notes, to Nightingale, “earthly friendships” were merely “a hindrance on the path to true righteousness.” All this we knew from Lytton Strachey's biting and elegant 1918 portrait in *Eminent Victorians*, a book that's famously debunking; Strachey had a keen eye for Nightingale's acerbity and a relish for describing it, but also plainly admired her achievements and her courage. Bostridge, author of a biography of Vera Brittain, doesn't fundamentally alter that picture but, by virtue of his prodigious research, enormously enriches it with the nuance and detail that fill in the nooks and crannies of a real, and enormously complicated, personality. Absorbing, superbly written, and authoritative, this is a terrific biography of a woman to whom we owe a great deal, but would perhaps never want to meet.

ENDANGERED SPECIES: BLACK RHINOCEROS, 1983; COLLECTION OF THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION; COURTESY OF THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION

Reading Dance

Edited by Robert Gottlieb

PANTHEON

The subtitle of this 1,300-plus-page doorstop—*A Gathering of Memoirs, Reportage, Criticism, Profiles, Interviews, and Some Uncategorizable Extras*—fairly summarizes its contents and aptly billboards its appeal. Which is to say that if a loving, deeply inclusive anthology of dance writing, annotated and curated by a literary luminary like Gottlieb (former editor in chief of Knopf, Simon & Schuster, and *The New Yorker*, as well as a noted dance critic and New York City Ballet associate), sounds like endlessly exciting one-stop shopping, well, it is. Certainly most of the major (and many of the minor) figures of the past two centuries are here: Bournonville, Duncan, Nijinsky, Astaire, Balanchine, Nureyev, Tharp, Baryshnikov—the list goes on and on (and on), with a few mincing surprises (recipes from LeClerc's *The Ballet Cookbook*, anyone?) thrown in for good measure. Ultimately, though, the worthiness of such a primer—obviously selective but seemingly exhaustive—is rooted squarely in the reader's basic interest in the art form. So give Gottlieb credit for not prancing around the obvious: as he notes at the outset, "One man's ideal anthology is another man's mess."

Eating the Sun:

How Plants Power the Planet

Oliver Morton

HARPER

This original account of photosynthesis does what every popular-science work strives to do: provide a lucid-to-the-lay-reader explanation of a mundane or complex phenomenon. Yet Morton goes well beyond that laudable achievement.

Folded cunningly into his disciplinary synthesis (physics, chemistry, cellular biology, environmental science) and basic explainer (what, exactly, photosynthesis is, and why apprehending "the most important process on the planet" is crucial to our understanding of today's pressing energy and climate-change issues) is nothing less than a majestic terrestrial biography—a meticulous look at the history and future of the Earth itself. All this is in a well-paced, smartly plotted, bouncingly written package. Buoyed by a tone of optimism and uplift ("The science that enriches our wonder at the world also offers us ways of making things better"), Morton's clear-eyed assessment makes visible a heretofore unseen world—ours—and illuminates its possibilities.

Admission

Jean Hanff Korelitz

GRAND CENTRAL

That Korelitz has previously produced a thriller or two is evident in the sublimely paced plotting of this sharply observed and written novel about a Princeton college admissions officer faced with a secret she's buried since her own undergraduate days. Among its delights is the book's thoughtful insider's guide to the delicate, arcane workings of elite-college admissions. While negotiating her personal crises, the protagonist works steadily through stacks of applications, articulately and sympathetically assessing waves of ambitious high-school students, Princeton itself, and her role as gatekeeper to a garden of academic brilliance to which she doesn't quite belong. Korelitz, married to the poet and Princeton professor Paul Muldoon, knows her stuff. Better yet, she knows how to tell a story. ■

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WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

By Jeffrey Goldberg



Am I obligated to be a bridesmaid for a friend whom I haven't seen since we graduated from high school in 2002? Last year, she "rekindled" our friendship via Facebook (rather forcefully—ultimatums were involved). She declares that I'm still one of her closest friends, but I in no way feel the same. I don't have the heart to tell her that our "friendship" ended when we set off for college. Cruel though it may sound, I never really missed her. What's a girl to do?

K. R., Lafayette, Calif.

Dear K. R.,
I don't know the nature of the "ultimatums" your ex-friend issued on Facebook (I'll assume they didn't include the threat of violence), but there's not much gray area here: you are duty-bound to tell her, in a forthright and sympathetic way, that it is inappropriate for you to participate in her wedding. It would be dishonest, and your resentment would certainly kill any hope of a rekindled friendship. Brides look to their bridesmaids as sources of support and reassurance. You would provide her neither, not on the wedding day, and not after. You owe it to her to tell her soon.

I love Jeffrey Goldberg's column, "What's Your Problem?" Keep up the good work. Here is my question: Are any of the folks requesting advice real, or do you make them up?

Laura Toich, Marlton, N.J.

Dear Laura,
They are all, indeed, real. I guarantee it 100 percent.

I love Jeffrey Goldberg's column, "What's Your Problem?" Keep up the good work.

Pope Benedict XVI, Vatican City

I can't relate to my boss at all. When I try to be nice, he thinks I'm a suck-up; when I ignore him, he thinks I'm a jerk. He got the job I wanted, and he knows I was a candidate for it. I think he wants me to leave the company, so he's not cutting me any slack. Also, he's my brother. This is my father's company. I don't want to leave, and I want my brother to ease up.

Todd S., New York, N.Y.

Dear Todd,
Your father seems to have developed a family succession plan for his business that does not include you. If it is possible for you to cash out and separate yourself from this unhappy situation, by all means do it. Even if setting out on

your own seems daunting, do it anyway. When you succeed, your brother and father, who right now don't value you professionally, may come to respect your moxie. And then you can take over the business, and fire your brother. Or, alternatively, treat him with the magnanimity he may not deserve.

I want to write for *The Atlantic* when I grow up. What should I do to prepare for this?

Maya Handa, Chapel Hill, N.C.

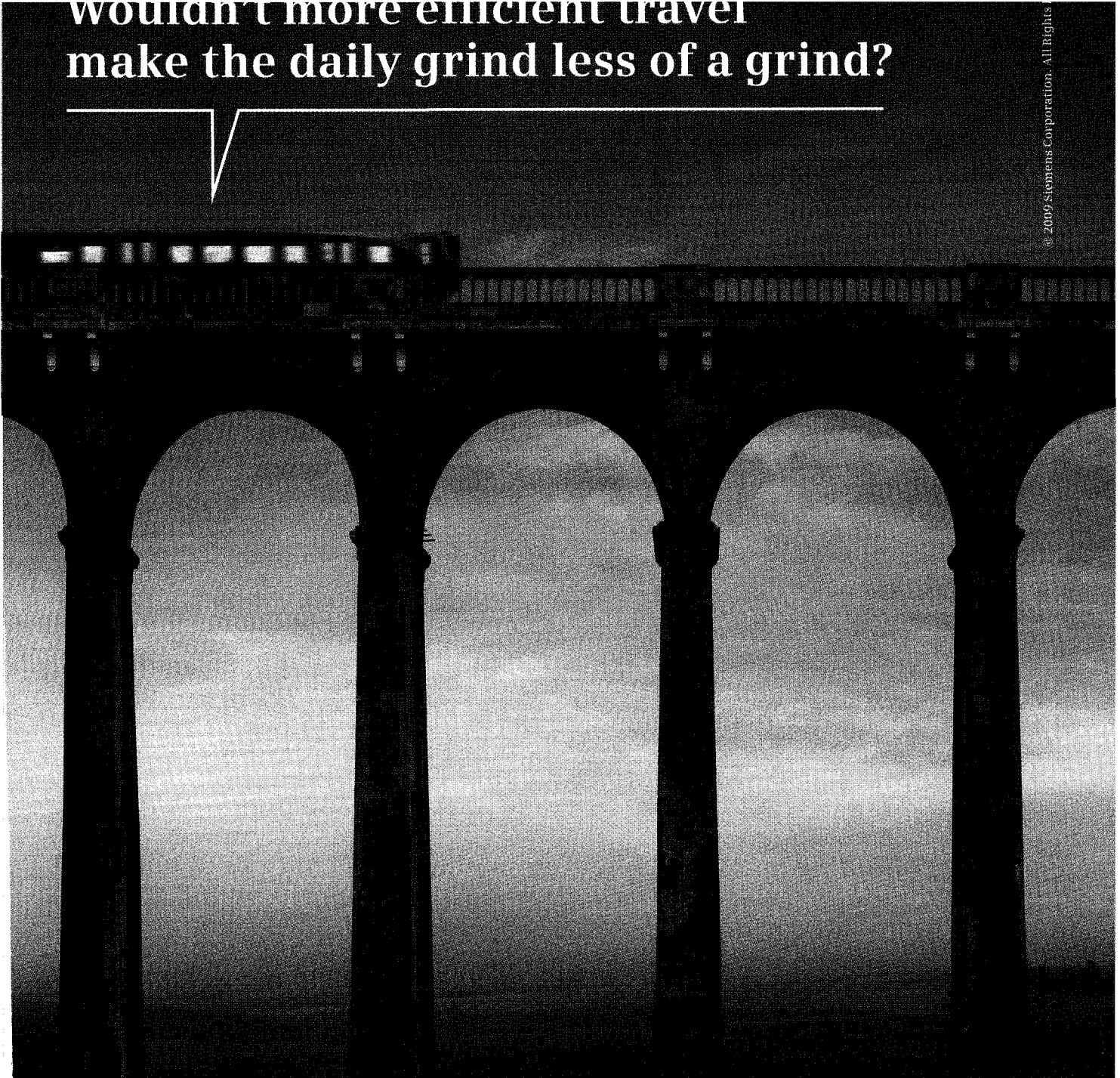
Dear Maya,
Journalism, as you may have heard, is not the most promising profession today. Only the toughest survive. But it's not impossible! You are going to have to apply yourself, however. I thought I would share with you the daily schedule of the current class of *Atlantic* interns, journalism's crème de la crème, to give you a sense of how they are readying themselves for magazine careers:

- 4:00 a.m.: Wake up
- 4:15 a.m.: Cardio-boxing with David Bradley, chairman, Atlantic Media Company
- 5:00 a.m.: Animal husbandry
- 5:15 a.m.: Chapel
- 5:45 a.m.: Time to make the doughnuts
- 6:15 a.m.: Prepare Presidential Daily Brief
- 9:00 a.m.: Plan for inevitable resurgence of print journalism
- 10:00 a.m.: Wake *Atlantic* senior editors
- 11:00 a.m.: Edit résumés
- 12:30 p.m.: Remove competing magazines from airport newsstands
- 5:00 p.m.: Prepare bedrolls for senior staff nap
- 6:00 p.m.: Crew practice
- 8:00 p.m.: Cardio-boxing examination
- 9:00 p.m.: Assign magazine cover stories
- 9:02 p.m.: Feed chickens
- 11:00 p.m.: Swim Tidal Basin
- 11:30 p.m.: Lights out ■

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